

“The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team.”

- Phill Jackson



# Exploring autonomy in teams

*A multiple case study of the relations between individual autonomy, team autonomy and team effectiveness*

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## Abstract

This research aims to explore the relations between individual autonomy, team autonomy and team effectiveness in order to provide insight in the possible interactions between the the two types of autonomy in relation team effectiveness, as well as on how specific contextual characteristics may affect these relationships. This research was performed at a social work organization located in the Netherlands. Data was collected using a survey and by conducting 18 semi-structured interviews divided over 11 teams of social workers and 2 managers. Data on team effectiveness was provided by the participating organization.

Unfortunately, this research was not able to find a relation between the variables based on the quantitative data. However, the qualitative part of this research suggests that there may be a relation in this specific organizational context. Based on the interviews, for both individual and team autonomy, several positive (e.g. job satisfaction, flexibility) and negative mechanisms (cohesiveness, intra-team coordination) are suggested in relation to team effectiveness.

Langfred (2000) suggested that task interdependence is a contingent factor influencing the simultaneous effect of individual and team autonomy on team effectiveness. This research suggests that social workers may experience *emotional interdependence*. Future research should empirically test whether emotional interdependence has the same function as task interdependence as proposed by Langfred (2000) in the relation between autonomy and team effectiveness.

This research suggests that *team proximity* may also be a contingent factor, because it could influence the relation between team autonomy and team effectiveness through enforcing the fragmentation effect that could result from a perceived high level of individual autonomy.

Finally, this research suggests that there is an indication that a tension between individual and team autonomy may be apparent in relation to team effectiveness as team autonomy may result in a decrease of *internal work motivation*, while individual autonomy seems to increase the motivation of team members. Future research should focus on empirically testing this possible tension.

*Keywords: individual autonomy, team autonomy, team effectiveness, team proximity, social work, emotional interdependence, motivation*

# Preface

While writing this, I am starting to realize that these may be the last few words I will write as an Organization Studies student. Applying for Extended Master programme is one of the best choices I have made in the past few years. The combination of writing an academic paper and gaining relevant work experience makes the Extended Master a programme that fits me like a glove. There are a couple of people without whom I would not have been able to complete this thesis.

First and foremost, I would like to thank NIM Maatschappelijk Werk, the organization where I followed my junior traineeship and where I conducted this research. The people at NIM were always willing to help and the organization invested a substantial amount of time in contributing to this research. I would like to thank all the teams that participated in this research, without them there would be no data. And, of course, I want to thank Thijs Knoeff, my professional supervisor at NIM, for his contribution to my personal development and his analytical input for this thesis. Thank you!

I would also like to thank Rob Pranger, my academic supervisor, for his excellent support during this semester. His personal approach and professional support really helped me with the process of writing this thesis. In addition, as the former coordinator of the Extended Master programme, he understands the organization specific context and how this context influenced the process and structure of this research. The same counts for Stefan Cloudt, the current coordinator of the Extended Master and my second supervisor. Stefan provided me of very useful feedback at the two most important moments during the process (i.e. the two defence meetings).

And, of course, I would like to thank my fellow students who participated in the same ‘thesis-circle’ for the useful critical feedback, the time they put into reading my thesis and for the pleasant conversations when discussing our experiences.

Enjoy reading!

Willem Peters

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Problem statement

In today's rapidly changing economy, organizations feel an increased need to be flexible and adaptable. For this reason, an alternative form of work teams is getting more attention: self-managing work teams (Cohen, 1991). "Teams are referred to as 'self-managing' when they are high in team-level autonomy, but such teams can vary in design in terms of their levels of individual autonomy" (Langfred, 2007: 888). Previous research suggests that team performance may decrease if team-level autonomy is forced on a group where members function very independently (i.e. autonomously) of one another (Pearce and Ravlin, 1987; Liden et al., 1997).

In January 2010, NIM Maatschappelijk Werk, a social work organization located in the Netherlands (hereafter: NIM), introduced the concept of self-managing teams by making the teams increasingly autonomous. At the same time, in order for the social professional to provide the appropriate care for each individual client, NIM grants the individual professionals a high amount of freedom in exerting their tasks as social workers. NIM is wondering if, and how, the high level of team autonomy in combination with a high level of individual autonomy is influencing the effectiveness of the teams.

In the existing literature, the overall tendency is that self-managing work teams are positively related to team effectiveness (e.g. Cohen and Ledford, 1994; Wellins et al., 1990; Wall et al., 1986). Goodman et al. (1988) state that there is no conceptual difference between the term autonomous work groups and self-managing teams, therefore the terms are used interchangeably in this research. The majority of the existing research focuses predominantly on the direct effect of team autonomy on team effectiveness, neglecting the possible influence of individual autonomy. As Langfred (2000: 563) states: "while there has been considerable focus on the effects of either individual autonomy or group autonomy on performance and other outcome measures, little attention has been given to the potential effects of both occurring simultaneously in a team or work group setting". In a later study (2005), he states that "organizational researchers have pointed to the potential tension between team

autonomy and individual autonomy within the team, suggesting that team performance may depend on the combination of the two”. Also, Markham and Markham (1995) emphasized the difficulty to incorporate considerable individual autonomy and group autonomy in the same work group simultaneously.

## **1.2 Research goal and question**

Hackman (1987) states that one of the key characteristics of self-managing teams is the face-to-face interaction between team members. High levels of individual autonomy may often involve a lack of interaction with other team members (Langfred, 2007). This study is interested in the dynamics resulting from the presence of high levels of both individual and team autonomy in teams. As Langfred (2000: 581) states: “[future] research should be focused on further exploring other mechanisms that may mediate the effects of autonomy on team effectiveness, as well as examining how specific contextual characteristics of different types of organizations may affect these relationships”. Langfred (2005), for example, found that team effectiveness is not only affected by the combination of individual and team autonomy, but that the optimal combination may depend on the level of task interdependence in a team. This study will adopt an explorative in-depth qualitative multiple case study design in order to answer to the call for exploring for further mediating mechanisms and contextual characteristics influencing the relation between both types of autonomy and team effectiveness, using the following research question:

*How do individual and team autonomy relate to team effectiveness?*

## **1.3 Relevance**

### **1.3.1 Scientific relevance**

As Langfred (2000: 582) states, “it is evident that there is a considerable need for more extensive research, particularly in organizational settings, in order to construct a more complex, but also more robust and generalizable, model”. This study will contribute to the existing literature as it builds on Langfred’s studies (2000; 2004; 2005; 2007) on the simultaneous effect of individual and team autonomy on team effectiveness, providing a clear overview of the possible mechanisms and contextual



factors explaining how individual and team autonomy may relate to team effectiveness, that could be empirically tested in future research.

### **1.3.2 Practical relevance**

NIM, the social work organization that is subject of this research, is struggling with the implementation of self-managing teams as the individual social workers are granted high levels of individual autonomy. They are wondering what the possible consequences are of making teams of social workers increasingly autonomous, while the individual social workers are already granted high levels of individual autonomy. This research can be used a tool for developing strategic choices as it provides a clear overview of how the teams and team members perceive autonomy, and provides insight in what the possible consequences are of incorporating high levels of both individual and team autonomy in relation to team effectiveness.

## **2. Theory**

### **2.1 Self-managing teams**

The basis for the concept of self-managing work teams derives from the socio-technical systems theory (Wall et al., 1986). Socio-technical systems theory seeks to improve productivity and human enrichment through a design process that focuses on the interdependencies between and among people, technology, and environment (Cummings, 1978), prescribing the joint optimization of the workers' social needs and the technological needs of the organization. The development of self-managing teams is a concrete outcome of this perspective.

A team, according to Cohen & Bailey (1997:241), is defined as “a collection of individuals who are interdependent in their tasks, who share responsibility for outcomes, who see themselves and who are seen by others as an intact social entity embedded in one or more larger social systems, and who manage their relationships across organizational boundaries”. Work teams, more specifically, “are continuing work units responsible for producing goods or providing service. Their membership is typically stable, usually full-time, and well defined. Work teams are found in both in manufacturing and service settings. Traditionally, work teams are directed by supervisors who make most of the decisions about what is done, how it is done, and who does it.” (Cohen & Bailey, 1997: 242). An alternative form of work teams are self-managing work teams, which are, according to Cohen & Bailey (1997) implemented by companies in order to reduce costs, to improve productivity, and to improve quality.

Self-managing teams, according to Goodman et al. (1988: 296) “are groups of individuals who can self-regulate work on their interdependent tasks”. In their chapter on groups and productivity they specify the key elements of self-managing teams as follows (p.296): “...(1) groups in which there is typically face-to-face interaction, (2) a physically defined area, (3) a whole set of interdependent tasks, and (4) group members who have control over the management and execution of these tasks. Here, management is referred to as activities such as planning, directing, organizing, staffing and monitoring and control. Control here, means that group members have

authority and responsibility to initiate the management activities. The whole set of tasks refers to all the interdependent activities required to produce a definable product<sup>4</sup>. Goodman et al. (1988) also state that the term autonomous work groups and self-management teams can be used interchangeably, because there is no conceptual difference between the two concepts.

## **2.2 Team autonomy**

Langfred (2000) defines team autonomy as the extent to which team members are able to exert direct control over the management and execution of an interdependent set of primary work tasks assigned to it by the organization. Of great importance is here, as Langfred (2000: 567) states, that “group autonomy is not the aggregation of individual autonomy to the group level, but a purely group-level construct with no meaningful existence at the individual level”. This means that any team can be described in terms of both the level of team autonomy and the average level of individual autonomy.

As mentioned above, autonomous teams are mainly hypothesized to be effective. With respect to the performance outcomes of self-managing work teams, previous research found a positive effect between self-managing work teams and performance, albeit that the effect is frequently just modestly (Beekun, 1989). Concerning the attitudinal outcomes of self-managing work teams, it is theoretically hypothesized that self-managing work teams improve the quality of work life (Cohen & Ledford, 1994). With respect to organizational commitment, previous research shows mixed findings. Cordery et al. (1991) for example, found that organizational commitment was higher for employees in autonomous teams as compared to teams that were traditionally organized, whereas Wall et al. (1986) did not find any effect between team autonomy and organizational commitment. Cohen and Ledford (1994: 14) argue that “the work and organizational designs for self-managing teams are motivating. Work in high task variety, autonomy, identity, significance, and feedback foster internal work motivation, which in turn leads to high performance and satisfaction”. Finally, Beekun (1989) suggests that self-managing work teams decrease absenteeism and turnover. However, the findings of Wall et al. (1986), Cordery et al. (1991) and Cohen & Ledford (1994) contradict these findings as their results show higher rates of absenteeism and/or turnover.

### **2.3 Individual autonomy**

Individual autonomy is defined as the amount of freedom and discretion an individual has in carrying out assigned tasks (Hackman, 1987) and frequently achieved through empowering workers with greater information and decision-making authority, so that they experience heightened self-determination (Spreitzer, 1995). Working more independently allows individual team members to take advantage of unique task-specific knowledge that may only be available to them (Latham, Winters, & Locke, 1994) without interfering with team coordination.

In general, individual autonomy is hypothesized to have a positive effect on team effectiveness. As Langfred (2004: 388) explains, “[this is based on] Hackman and Oldham’s (1976) job characteristics model and the logic that decision-making power should be in the hands of the individuals with the most information about a task”. Langfred (2004), however, suggests that high levels of individual autonomy in a team should be accompanied by relatively high levels of monitoring. Insufficient monitoring could lead to lower performance. Also, team performance may suffer in self-managing teams with high levels of individual autonomy when there is too much trust, because individuals are monitoring each other: “this appears to be particularly important, as high levels of intra-team trust are especially likely to make team members reluctant to monitor one another” (Langfred, 2004: 391).

### **2.4 Team autonomy, individual autonomy and team effectiveness**

Markham and Markham (1995) emphasized the difficulty to incorporate considerable individual autonomy and group autonomy in the same work group simultaneously. Langfred (2000) explains: “It has been pointed out that performance may suffer if group-level autonomy is forced on a group where members function very independently (i.e. autonomously) of one another (Pearce and Ravlin, 1987; Liden et al., 1997)” (p.565).

In his study, Langfred (2000) takes the first step in “exploring the simultaneous effect of individual and group autonomy, examining the possible interaction or conflict between individual-level autonomy and group-level autonomy in work groups” (p. 566) and incorporates both levels of autonomy as well as suggesting an indirect effect through the concept of group cohesiveness (figure 1). Langfred (2000) suggested that a tension can arise as group autonomy may increase the level of group cohesiveness

as a result of three proposed mechanisms. First, “it increases the salience of the group as a unit, since the autonomy is at the group level, and relates to group-level tasks. Second, since the autonomy relates to group-level tasks, it also increases the salience of the group's task environment within the larger organization, which likely includes other work groups. Finally, the willingness of the organizational leadership to grant the autonomy may cause group members to make inferences about the beliefs of management and the relative status or importance of the work group” (p.567). Individual autonomy, on the other hand, could cause a decrease in group cohesiveness and therefore team effectiveness as a result of less interaction between group members as individual work becomes more independently (Langfred 2000).

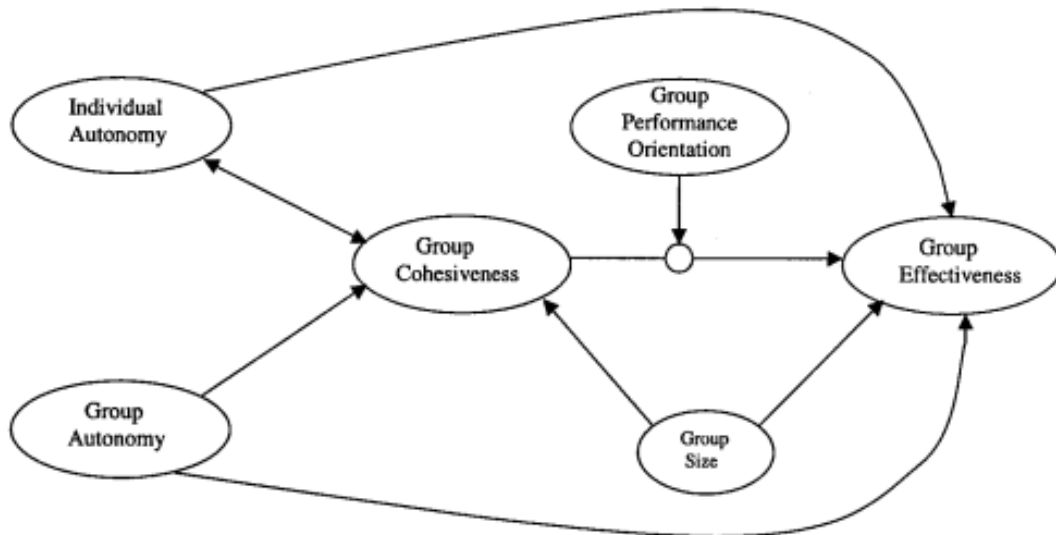


Figure 1. A model of individual and group autonomy. Reprinted from “The paradox of self-management: individual and group autonomy in work groups” by Langfred, C. W. (2000). *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 21: 566.

In a later study, Langfred (2005) found that team effectiveness is not only affected by the combination of individual and team autonomy, but that the optimal combination may depend on the level of *task interdependence* in a team. He states: “Specifically, teams characterized by high task interdependence performed better with high levels of team autonomy, but worse with high levels of individual autonomy. In contrast, teams characterized by low task interdependence performed worse with high levels of team autonomy, but better with high levels of individual autonomy. In addition, I demonstrate that team performance was influenced by the combination of team-level and individual-level autonomy in the team” (p. 523-524).

## 2.5 Team effectiveness

“Interpretive difficulties arise when one examines how team outcomes are conceptualized and measured. Like the construct team, outcome is also multidimensional and poorly conceptualized, making comparisons across studies very difficult” (Lemieux-Charles and McGuire, 2006: 265-266).

According to Cohen et al. (1994: 3), “some theorists specify that their general group effectiveness models are applicable to self-managing work teams (Cummings, 1978; Hackman, 1987). From this perspective, the same characteristics that determine group effectiveness will determine self-managing work teams, because they are simply one type of group. Others have argued for more fine-grained models of group effectiveness taking into consideration differences in technology and organizational arrangements (Cohen & Ledford, 1994)”. In their review, Cohen et al. (1997: 646) state that self-managing work team effectiveness is defined in terms of “*performance effectiveness* (e.g. controlling costs, improving productivity and quality), *employee attitudes about their quality of work life* (e.g. job satisfaction, organizational commitment) and *employee behaviour* (absenteeism)”.

Team researchers are increasingly using broader conceptualizations of team effectiveness, including objective and subjective measures. Still, the team effectiveness literature lacks specificity with respect to what teams are expected to be effective at doing (Lemieux-Charles and McGuire, 2006).

This study uses Langfred’s (2000) definition of group effectiveness, namely: “the extent to which explicit group goals, that are assigned by the organization, are achieved.” (p.569).

## 2.6 Summary

It is clear that Langfred (2000; 2004; 2005; 2007) has already put a lot of effort in studying the combined effect of team autonomy and individual autonomy in relation to team effectiveness. His studies showed that the combined effect may be mediated by group cohesiveness and that the optimal combination of individual and team autonomy may depend on the level of task interdependence in a team. Group cohesiveness and task interdependence are, thus, a mediating mechanism and a contextual factor influencing the simultaneous effect of autonomy on team

effectiveness. This study aims to explore for further mechanisms and contextual characteristics in order to require more insight in this simultaneous effect of autonomy on team effectiveness. The next chapter explains how.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1 Research setting

This research was performed at NIM Maatschappelijk Werk in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. NIM is an organization that provides free social care for those people who cannot help themselves. Problems ranging from divorces to financial issues are the order of the day for the social professional of NIM. NIM has a total number of 141 employees, of which 100 social workers. These social workers are divided over 15 teams of different sizes ranging from 11 to 2 members.

### 3.2 Research design

This study used a multiple-case study approach. A multiple-case approach was used, because it allowed the researcher to focus on a few cases in more detail by which the researcher gained an in-depth understanding of the relationships between the variables that are subject of the study (Bryman, 2008).

The unit of analysis were the teams of social workers at NIM Maatschappelijk Werk. The unit of observation were the individual social workers of NIM.

### 3.3 Data collection

Data collection was performed in two stages. Stage one focused on acquiring quantitative data that was used as a basis for the qualitative part of this study. In stage two, data was collected qualitatively by conducting semi-structured individual and group interviews.

#### *Stage 1: descriptive statistics as the starting point*

This research focused mainly on qualitative data. However, in order to ensure a solid starting point for the qualitative part, it was of importance to measure the level of individual and team autonomy of the teams of NIM involved in this research. No specific analysis or regression was performed, as the amount of teams that participated in this study was insufficient for finding significant results. All individual members of the selected teams were asked to participate in a survey. The survey was used in order to get an understanding of the current level of individual and team



autonomy. Team effectiveness was not included in the survey, because facts and figures about team effectiveness were provided by the organization. Based on the response on the questionnaire, mean scores are produced for each level of autonomy.

The survey was digitally distributed among all team members of the selected teams by e-mail. “Thesistools” was used for producing and distributing the questionnaire. Three reminders were sent in order to get the response rate higher. Still, the total number of respondents is only 30, divided over 11 teams, resulting in a response rate of 51,61%. Two teams did not fill in the questionnaire, so no data was available for these two teams.

*Stage 2: in-depth qualitative research*

As for the in-depth qualitative part, semi-structured individual interviews and group discussions were conducted. For each team, a group interview was conducted, for larger teams (N>3) the senior social worker was interviewed additionally and the managers of the teams that participated in this research were interviewed. A total of 18 interviews were conducted (Table 1). This means that a total of 44 employees of NIM are interviewed.

*Table 1. Overview interviews*

Type of interviewee	Type of interview	# Participants
Team 1	Group interview	2 social workers
Team 2	Group interview	2 social workers
Team 3	Group interview	2 social workers
	Individual interview	Senior social worker
Team 4	Group interview	4 social workers
	Individual interview	Senior social worker
Team 5	Group interview	3 social workers
	Individual interview	Senior social worker
Team 6	Group interview	6 social workers
Team 7	Group interview	5 social workers
	Individual interview	Senior social worker
Team 8	Group interview	3 social workers
	Individual interview	Senior social worker
Team 9	Group interview	6 social workers
Team 10	Group interview	2 social workers
Team 11	Group interview	2 social workers
Manager 1	Individual interview	Manager
Manager 2	Individual interview	Manager

*Individual semi-structured interviews* were held with the senior social workers and with the managers of the teams. Semi-structured interviews were used in order to collect in-depth data on the relationships between individual and team autonomy and team effectiveness.

The managers at NIM have a large span of control. There are only 2 managers divided over the 11 teams. The managers were interviewed, because they have a clear overview of how the different teams function relative to each other and can therefore provide useful information on *why* and *how* the teams differ in terms of autonomy and team effectiveness. In addition, they can compare how the different teams react on the different levels of autonomy and can provide explanations on how they think autonomy relates to team effectiveness. According to Langfred (2000), managers are less distorted as compared to the self-serving perception of team members and are better trained and sometimes educated to assess the variables, especially with respect to team effectiveness. Besides, they are the ones who instructed the teams on to what extent they have individual and group autonomy, and assess every individual social worker on their performance. Concerning the choice for interviewing the senior social workers: they have more extensive, management related tasks as compared to social workers and can therefore provide useful insights.

With respect to the *group discussions*, the goal was to get a more in-depth insight in the intra-team relationships and group dynamics. Team members have the opportunity to react on each other's arguments, which could result in more extensive elaborations on the mechanisms that are subject of this study.

All the interviews were anonymous and respondents were guaranteed that the information given was treated confidentially in order to stimulate more openness.

### **3.4 Measurements**

This section provides information on the measurements of the different variables used in this study. Per separate variable, the quantitative measurement as well as the qualitative measurement will be explained. A topic list based on the literature was developed and used for the semi-structured interviews and can be found in the 'Appendices'.

### 3.4.1 Individual autonomy

For individual autonomy, an eight-item scale based on Breugh's (1985) well-validated and frequently used (e.g. Langfred (2005)) scale for the measurement of individual job autonomy was used. Sample questions included "I am able to choose the way to go about my work in the team" and "I can decide when to do particular activities as part of my work in the team". Breugh's scale was translated to Dutch as the respondents speak Dutch. A confirmatory factor analysis was performed in order to determine if the proposed factors fit their associated questionnaire items in the translated version of the scale as will be explained later this chapter. Mean scores with standard deviations were used in the descriptive statistics in order to compare the teams.

The focus of the semi-structured interviews was on how much freedom *the individual* has in doing their work and the amount of involvement with for example planning and goal-setting. During the semi-structured individual interviews with the senior social worker, questions were asked about their perception on individual autonomy and what it actually means in practice. In order to explore the relationship between individual autonomy and team effectiveness, questions were asked about *how* individual autonomy may impact team effectiveness, focusing on possible mediating effects or contextual factors influencing the effect.

The managers of the teams were asked about how they define individual autonomy and what their strategic vision is on granting autonomy to individual social workers and how granting autonomy could influence team effectiveness according to them. Also, it was expected that the managers could provide useful information on how the teams differ regarding individual autonomy and how it currently influences the effectiveness of the different teams.

Other than in the individual interviews, the participants of the semi-structured group interviews had the possibility to react on each other's statements, which created valuable insights concerning the relations between the variables. Like during the individual interviews, the teams were also asked about their perception of individual autonomy and how it affects their effectiveness as a team, but now the individual team members could have different opinions as a result of different perspectives or experiences. The discussion between the individual team members resulted in more

possible mediating or moderating variables influencing the relationship between individual autonomy and team effectiveness.

### **3.4.2 Team autonomy**

Like Langfred (2005) this study used an adapted version of Breugh's (1985) 7-point Individual Autonomy Scale. As Langfred states: "in exploring the simultaneous effects of individual and team-level autonomy, the importance of consistency in the operationalization of autonomy itself—at both the team and individual level—outweighs the advantages of other, more established scales" (p. 518). This adapted scale uses Breugh's individual-level items but applies them to the team instead of to the individual. Breugh's scale was translated to Dutch. A confirmatory factor analysis was performed in order to determine if the proposed factors fit their associated questionnaire items in the translated version of the scale (see later in this chapter). As with individual autonomy, mean scores with standard deviations were used in the descriptive statistics in order to compare the teams.

For the semi-structured individual interviews with the senior social workers, the focus was on how they interpret team level autonomy and to what extent they perceive autonomy on a team level. This was asked after discussing the concept of individual autonomy, as it was assumed that the social workers experience high levels of individual autonomy as a result of the nature of the job, which is highly individually oriented. What does it mean to be part of a team? What are the primary work tasks assigned to the team, and to what extent are the team members able to exert direct control over these tasks? Furthermore, how does the team level autonomy influence the team effectiveness? The senior social workers are part of the team as a social worker, but are also provided with management related tasks and are responsible for coordinating these tasks. As a result of this coordinating role, the senior social worker has a clear view on the team dynamics and the different perceptions regarding team autonomy, which could provide useful insights on how autonomy influences team effectiveness.

The managers were asked what their strategic vision is on team autonomy and how and to what extent they think the team members perceive team autonomy. The perception of the team members concerning team autonomy is a result of the actions of the manager; therefore the manager provided useful information about their role

with respect to autonomy and the effect on team effectiveness.

During the semi-structured group interviews the same logic was applied as during the individual interviews with respect to discussing team autonomy after the concept of individual autonomy. After exploring the separate relations between autonomy and team effectiveness, the teams were asked if they experience a tension between the two levels of autonomy and if there are factors influencing the simultaneous effect of both levels of autonomy on team effectiveness. This, in order to explore for possible mediating mechanisms or contextual factors of the combined effect of autonomy on team effectiveness.

### **3.4.3 Team effectiveness**

Team effectiveness was measured using two indicators proposed by NIM. First, the weighted production average over the year 2012 divided by the FTE per team was used in order to get insight in the team level output. The production averages are ‘weighted’ as production is divided in different types of contact with clients. The weight to every type of contact (i.e. long versus short) is assigned by the organization. After having contact with a client, the social worker has to report on his/her actions through a registration system. Because the teams differ in size, the weighted average production is presented per FTE. Second, the average waiting time in weeks over the same period of time for clients to have their first appointment with a social worker was used. This second indicator is used because the teams have the collective responsibility to manage the waiting list of their working area and therefore, to a certain extent, have an influence on the waiting time. The teams can, for example, organize group sessions for clients when the waiting time increases, or they can call for help from other teams or management.

During the qualitative part of the research, the teams, the senior social workers and the managers were asked how they would define team effectiveness and to what extent they agree on the measure used by the organization. When their definition differed from the definition or measure used by this research, the respondents were asked how they would define team effectiveness and how they would measure the concept. In addition, if the respondents came up with different indicators for team effectiveness, the respondents were asked how autonomy influences these indicators.

### 3.5 Sample

#### 3.5.1 Sampling strategy

Using purposive sampling, 11 teams of social workers were included as cases in this study. The selection criteria are set up in accordance with the management of NIM Maatschappelijk Werk. The teams selected consist of social workers responsible for a common goal: providing social work in a specific area. 4 teams were excluded based on these selection criteria.

#### 3.5.2 Sample characteristics

The selected teams range in size from 2 to 11 social workers. 29% of the respondents are male, and the average age of the respondents is 44,88 years old (SD: 11,97). The respondents work on average for 9,7 years at NIM (SD: 8,00) and have on average 4,8 years of experience within the current team (SD: 4,39) (Table 2). 50% of the respondents are social workers, 44,44% is senior social worker and 5,56% is intern at NIM Maatschappelijk Werk. No data on team 10 and team 11 was available since they have not filled in the survey.

Table 2. Sample characteristics

Team	Age		Experience NIM		Experience Team	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
1 (N=2)	47,5	20,5	19,5	19	3	2,8
2 (N=3)	37,3	11,6	6	5,5	4	2,6
3 (N=6)	41	11,5	7,5	6	3,6	4,6
4 (N=2)	41,5	2,1	9	7	9	7
5 (N=3)	46,6	14	10,6	4,2	7,3	4
6 (N=3)	54	7	18,6	10,7	5,7	4,5
7 (N=4)	44	7,1	7,2	6,2	2,25	1,9
8 (N=5)	43	16	7,4	4,7	6	5,7
9 (N=2)	39	19	8	9,9	8	9,9
10	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
11	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

### 3.6 Preliminary analyses

#### 3.6.1 Factor analysis

Although a total of 30 respondents is in general too limited to perform a confirmatory factor analysis (Palant, 2007), a CFA was performed in order to determine if the proposed factors fit their associated questionnaire items. Before conducting the CFA, the KMO measure (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was

assessed. In all cases the KMO value exceeded the recommended value of .60 and the Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity reached statistical significance (Pallant, 2007, p.174) (Table 3). Concerning ‘team autonomy’, items 2 and 3 showed a correlation of ,943 (see ‘Apendices’), which indicates multicollinearity. This means that this scale does not meet all the requirements for performing a factor analysis. The ‘individual autonomy’-scale, which consists of the same items on the individual level, did not show this high correlation between the same items. The factor analysis performed on the ‘individual autonomy’-scale showed two components. The first component consisted of the items 2, 3, 7, 8 (see ‘Apendices’) and the second component included the items 1, 4, 5 and 6. Interpretating the items, the first component could be about the autonomy concerning ‘working methods’ and ‘goal setting’. The second component can be interpreted as items on the autonomy with respect to ‘planning’. Although the factor analysis showed these two concepts on the ‘individual autonomy’-scale, this research did not make a distinction between the groups of items as the N is only 30 and it therefore can be discussed wether performing a factor analysis was justified.

### 3.6.2 Reliability analysis

In order to check for internal consistency, Cronbach’s Alpha was calculated for both scales. “A scale has to have a Cronbach’s Alpha higher than 0.7 to be deemed reliable” (Pallant, 2007, p. 98). Both scales meet this requirement (Table 3). In addition, the ‘Cronbach’s Alpha if item deleted’-table (see ‘Apendices’) shows that no items should be deleted on both scales.

Table 3. Factor and reliability analysis

	<i>Individual autonomy</i>	<i>Team autonomy</i>
KMO	,776	N/A
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity (sig.)	,000**	N/A
Cronbach’s Alpha	,869	,890

\*\*p<,05

## **3.7 Data analysis**

### **3.7.1 Quantitative data**

The data resulting from the first stage are presented as descriptive statistics and were used as the starting point for the qualitative part of the research. Through calculating the average scores on both levels of autonomy, an overview of the differences between the teams in terms of perceived individual and team autonomy was produced. No items were reverse coded; so the higher the average score, the higher the level of autonomy. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed in order to check if the team differ in terms of level of autonomy (see ‘Results’).

Concerning the quantitative data on team effectiveness, the weighted average of team production divided by the FTE per team was compared with the waiting time for clients per team, in order to see if there is a pattern with regard to the average weighted production and the waiting time per team. Does a team with lower average production have a longer average waiting time for clients? No pattern matching was possible as the analysis of variance showed that there are no significant differences between the teams in terms of autonomy as will be explained in the ‘Results’ chapter. The descriptive statistics produced in this first stage, functioned as a solid base for the second, in-depth qualitative, part of the study as specific questions were asked based on the quantitative results.

### **3.7.2 Qualitative data**

All interviews were recorded. The first three interviews were transcribed and analyzed and because all interviews had the same structure, the remaining interviews were selectively transcribed and, subsequently, coded using a table that was developed in order to extract the relevant information of the interviews (Table 4). Data analysis was performed in the following way: after conducting the interviews, the interviews were listened to in the smallest detail at first, followed by accurate data reduction using a developed coding scheme. Selective coding was applied for the core concepts by marking phrases of text in the transcripts or directly transcribed in the table from the audio file. This provided a clear overview of the data on the core concepts individually. Considering the relations between the variables, and therefore the mechanisms, open coding was applied (Table 4). After all interviews were coded, the



different tables were analyzed and core themes were extracted from the tables and presented in the ‘Results’ chapter. An explorative, open-minded, attitude was adopted because of the possibilities of finding moderating and/or intervening variables.

The codes were given names that give an indication of the concept that underpins the theme or category. If a theme was identified from the data that did not fit the codes already existing, a new code was created. For example: every team has elaborated on how individual autonomy has an effect on their team effectiveness (either positively or negatively), explaining the mechanism through various concepts (e.g. motivation). Quotes and descriptive examples were used to illustrate the mechanisms and to bring the data to life. The relations extracted from the analysis of the qualitative data were visualized in conceptual models, which create a clear representation of the suggested possible mechanisms. In order to enhance the reliability, the topic list used for the interviews and the tables of the analyzed interviews are provided (see ‘Appendices’). Inter-coder reliability has been ensured since only one researcher performed the coding.

Table 4. Coding scheme

Concept	Categories	Codes	Results in quotes
Individual autonomy			
Team autonomy			
Team effectiveness			
Individual autonomy and team effectiveness			
Team autonomy and team effectiveness			
Individual and team autonomy on team effectiveness			
Other			

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Quantitative results

This section presents the results of the questionnaire and the quantitative data on team effectiveness. 30 respondents, divided over 9 teams, filled in the questionnaire. As mentioned in the previous chapter, two teams did not fill in the questionnaire. The team averages and standard deviations for the dependent and independent variables of this research are summarized in Table 5. The standard deviations can be used to describe the variability of the distribution of scores. As Table 5 shows, there are several teams with a rather high standard deviation on both the variables, meaning that the range of scores on the variables is relatively large. Important with respect to the standard deviations is that the response rate per team is rather low and it therefore can be questioned whether the standard deviation is a proper representation for the whole team.

Table 5. Individual and team autonomy

Team	Individual autonomy		Team autonomy	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
1 (N=2)	6,38	,54	6,06	1,33
2 (N=3)	6,29	,64	5,67	1,15
3 (N=6)	5,83	,73	5,31	,70
4 (N=2)	5,88	,71	6,06	,62
5 (N=3)	5,29	,38	4,54	,19
6 (N=3)	5,88	,33	4,58	1,58
7 (N=4)	6,13	,53	5,50	,66
8 (N=5)	5,38	,66	5,65	,54
9 (N=2)	5,75	,35	5,63	,53
10	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
11	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

As can be derived from the table above, all the teams score rather high on both of the variables, meaning that the respondents perceive high levels of team autonomy and high levels of individual autonomy.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that there is no significant statistical difference between the teams concerning the average scores on both the autonomy scales (Table 6). Therefore, we cannot state that the teams significantly differ in levels of team autonomy and individual autonomy. This excludes the possibility of

comparing teams based on differences in perceived levels of autonomy.

Table 6. ANOVA

Variable	Sig.
Team autonomy	,384
Individual autonomy	,338

The table below (Table 7) shows the weighted average production corrected for FTE per team and the average waiting time per team. High weighed average production per FTE and low average waiting time indicate a high level of team effectiveness. It could be expected that when production is high, the average waiting time is low as the teams are able to help more clients. In order to check if the average weighted production corresponds with the average waiting time, the teams are ranked according to both indicators (Table 8). As can be seen in Table 8, for six out of ten teams (team 10 is excluded as the production numbers and waiting time are not available) relative high levels (as compared to other teams) in weighted average production corresponds with relative (as compared to other teams) short waiting times. There is a notable difference between the weighted average production and the waiting time for clients for the remaining four teams. Team 3, for example, has the shortest waiting time of all teams, but has a relatively low level of weighted production. This also goes for team 1. Team 5, on the contrary, has the highest weighted production per FTE of the teams participating in this research, but also has a relatively long waiting time as compared to the other teams. The results do not show a clear pattern with respect to the different indicators of team effectiveness.



Table 7. Team effectiveness

Team	Weighted average production/FTE	Average waiting time
1	52,01	3,9
2	92,21	4,3
3	71,51	1,4
4	75	8,3
5	112,44	9,1
6	64,27	13,9
7	78,59	16,9

8	55,63	19,6
9	97	3
10*	N/A	N/A
11	92,25	8,3

\*Team 10 was excluded because no data was available

Table 8. Weighted production per FTE versus waiting time\*

<b>High weighted production (relatively)</b>    <b>Low weighted production (relatively)</b>	Team 5	Team 3	<b>Short average waiting time (relatively)</b>    <b>Long average waiting time (relatively)</b>
	Team 9	Team 9	
	Team 11	Team 1	
	Team 2	Team 2	
	Team 7	Team 11	
	Team 4	Team 4	
	Team 3	Team 5	
	Team 6	Team 6	
	Team 8	Team 7	
	Team 1	Team 8	

\*Team 10 was excluded because no data was available

Because no variation in levels of autonomy on both the individual at the team level was found, and no clear pattern concerning team effectiveness can be determined, no relation was found between the two types of autonomy and team effectiveness. The qualitative part of this study, however, suggests that there is an indication that the relation in this specific context exist and will explore the possible mechanisms occurring as a result of both high levels of individual autonomy as well as high levels of team autonomy in relation to team effectiveness. In addition, previous research has shown that there is a relation between both types of autonomy and team effectiveness (Langfred, 2000; 2004; 2007).

## **4.2 Qualitative results**

No relation between individual and team autonomy and team effectiveness was found based on the quantitative data, because no variation on the levels of autonomy was found and the team effectiveness measure did not show a clear pattern concerning the differences between teams. The qualitative part of this study was originally designed to explore the mechanisms behind a relation. However, based on the qualitative data and findings of previous research, this research assumes that there is a relation between both types of autonomy and team effectiveness.

In this section, thus, the results of the group interviews with the teams, the individual interviews with the senior social workers and the individual interviews with the managers will be presented. First, the concept of team effectiveness will be discussed, followed by the different levels of autonomy. The elaboration on the different concepts provides context and creates an understanding of the specific organizational context. Subsequently, the results on the relations between the different levels of autonomy and team effectiveness will be elaborated on. It is of importance to discuss the separate relations between both types of autonomy and team effectiveness as the possible mechanisms behind these separate relations form the basis for understanding how the two types of autonomy may interact in relation to team effectiveness. Finally, it will be discussed how the possible mechanisms explaining the separate relations between both types of autonomy and team effectiveness may interact and what factors may influence the simultaneous effect of both types of autonomy on team effectiveness.

### **4.2.1 Team effectiveness**

Team effectiveness is, as already stated in the introduction and theoretical framework, a highly complex concept. Besides, NIM does not formally assess the social workers on a team level, which made measuring team effectiveness and explaining the relationship between both types of autonomy and team effectiveness additionally complex. The measure used in this research did not lead to a valuable insight in how the teams differ regarding their effectiveness. Therefore, this section will be used to describe how the respondents interpret team effectiveness in order to gain insight in that concept within this specific organizational context on the one hand. On the other

hand, these interpretations could be of importance when exploring the relations between autonomy and performance as the two types of autonomy could have an influence on different outcomes.

By analyzing the definitions provided by the respondents, a distinction between *outcomes* and *critical success factors* can be made. Critical success factors, according to Boynton & Zmud (1986: 17) are “those few things that must go well to ensure success for a manager or an organization, and therefore, they represent those managerial or enterprise areas that must be given special and continual attention to bring about high performance”. In Table 9 the different indicators for the outcome variables as well as for the critical success factors are presented with the amount of times respondents mentioned the indicator.

Table 9. Team effectiveness

Concept	Categories	Indicators	N
Team effectiveness	Outcomes	Production	11
		Waiting time	5
		Customer satisfaction	7
		Network partner satisfaction	6
		Client satisfaction	6
		Achieving team goals	3
	Critical success factors	Network position	8
		Adaptive capacity	4
		Emotional well-being	4

#### 4.2.1.1 Outcomes

##### *Production targets & waiting time*

Currently, both the financier and NIM use production targets as a team level outcome measure for monitoring team effectiveness. Interesting is that all of the teams indicate that production targets in terms of number of cases produced (one case represents one client helped) is not an appropriate measure for team performance. “Producing a case indicates barely anything. I can produce fifty cases and deliver bad quality, I can

produce sixty cases and deliver good quality or I can produce twenty cases and deliver very good quality. It says nothing” (team 8). The production only indicates the quantity of cases produced in a year. And, because every case is unique, it is possible that one case takes two weeks until the problem is solved, whereas other cases could take nine months. This is what the manager thinks: “effectiveness is not only counting cases, but also delivering the right care for solving someone’s problem(s). This means that sometimes you have to invest more time in a client, because by doing so you can ensure that the person is able to manage his situation on his own. And sometimes effectiveness means that you quit helping somebody, because the person has an excellent neighbour who can help him or her”. Besides, the production target is no problem at all to achieve and overproducing means that NIM is providing care without compensation as the budget is already allocated to a certain amount of cases.

Another point of criticism is the fact that the team level production targets are simply the sum of the individual level targets and the individual team members are assessed on their production target, while the team is not formally assessed at all. The only collective responsibility concerning the production of cases is the distribution of the incoming cases among the individual team members and ensuring that the team level production target is achieved when a team member drops out. Not only the team members and the managers are critical of the objective measurement of team effectiveness, a social worker tells about an official who observed her during her work: “after the observation the official said: wow, this is it. Those numbers, forget them. You have to tell us about cases!”. This indicates that the production numbers solely do not represent the value of the work that is done by the social workers. Because a production target seems not an adequate indicator of effectiveness, the managers also look at the waiting time (for clients to get help after application) as an objective indicator. But here again, these numbers are highly dependent on the working area (i.e. the population) and the type of problems the different teams are facing.

In short, according to the teams that participated in this research, production does say something about the quantity of produced cases, however, quantity in delivering a service such as social work, seems not to be an adequate measure for team effectiveness. The same goes for waiting time. Of importance, here, is that the

emphasis of the criticism on the production targets and average waiting time is on the fact that these outcome measures *solely* do not represent team effectiveness. Several respondents indicate that the production targets could be part of a broader measure of team effectiveness. Therefore, the managers state that, aside from the production numbers, they rely on the feedback they receive from the teams on more subjective indicators of performance outcomes.

### ***Stakeholder satisfaction***

A more subjective outcome measure suggested by the respondents is the external stakeholder satisfaction. The different external stakeholders the respondents mention are: *the customer (i.e. the financier, local government), the clients and the network partners*. The customers, here, are the local governments (and for team 10 a housing corporation) as they are the financier. In general, the only output the local governments see on operational level, are the production numbers NIM is presenting them. Therefore, maintaining a good relationship with the local government is essential. “If they are satisfied, you are doing a good job for the outside world. There is less focus on the substantive work with clients” (Team 2). An other team states: “our local government is not very satisfied at the moment, so that is our focus at the moment. If we can restore their confidence, we can step our game up. This will be different for other teams. Team 2 for example, I know that the local government there is very satisfied, so their focus will be on other stakeholders” (Team 1). This could indicate that the satisfaction of the financier is perceived as highly important by this team.

Of course, the financier’s satisfaction will be partly based on the production agreement, but the respondents argue that it also depends on how/if you present yourself as a team during formal meetings. The organization has to create a positive image. A satisfied network partner could foster this positive image of NIM as an organization, according to the teams. Team 11, for example, suggests that the satisfaction of network partners gives a adequate representation of how a team cooperates with other organizations, which is essential for helping clients.

Respondents point out that they intrinsically work for satisfied clients. Their main responsibility is on helping people with their problems so they become self-sufficient.



“I measure my effectiveness to a large extent in terms of the satisfaction of the client. I would say: if the client does not come back to NIM or a different organization, I have succeeded”. Client satisfaction can be argued to be more an effectiveness indicator on the individual level, as social work is characterized by individual treatment. Stakeholder satisfaction could provide a valuable insight in how they teams operate within their network and in the quality of the service provided by the teams of social workers.

***Achieving team goals***

Three teams also indicate that the effectiveness of the teams could also be measured using their annual plan. Part of the annual plan is the abovementioned production target, but they also describe how they will approach the market in the next year. Evaluating the teams’ annual plans could provide insight in their last year’s goal achievement. The teams are free to choose any format for their annual plan and are free to choose *what* they include in their annual plan. This makes it difficult to compare the teams in terms of effectiveness based on the annual plans.

Table 10. Team effectiveness: outcomes

Outcomes	
Production	Production of cases is perceived as not an adequate measure of team effectiveness, because it focuses on quantity, not quality of care.
Waiting time	The waiting time for clients to get help from a social worker. Respondents state that the numbers are highly dependent on the working area and could therefore be misleading.
Stakeholder satisfaction	Client satisfaction seems an indicator for the quality of the treatment provided by the social worker.
	Network partner satisfaction provides an indication on how the team (co)operates within the network.
	Customer satisfaction seems to be perceived as the top priority for the teams since the funding depends on the satisfaction of the financier.
Achieving team goals	Achieving the goals formulated in the team’s annual plan. The annual plans could contain information on network position, production goals and working methods. In addition, the plans are focused on the specificity of the working area.

#### ***4.2.1.2 Critical success factors***

Besides specific outcome definitions of team effectiveness, the teams also suggest critical success factors as part of their definition of team effectiveness. The critical success factors are elaborated on, since they could be embedded in the mechanisms explaining the relation between autonomy and team effectiveness.

##### ***Network position***

The team's network position is indicated as one of the success factors of team effectiveness. "I think we are effective if we are visible for the client and relevant organizations in the network, so they can approach us" (team 8). A senior social worker from team 3 states: "If you manage to position yourself as a team properly towards the local government and other network partners, it will be beneficial for the client as redirecting clients will be smoother and you are able to involve the right organizations at the right time in the treatment program, so a client can be helped as quickly as possible". The teams indicate that if they are highly embedded in the network, they can work more preventive as problems can be solved more quickly or can be recognized in an earlier stadium.

##### ***Adaptive capacity***

Teams argue that, as a result of an extremely turbulent environment, teams of social workers need to be highly flexible and adaptive in order to react on environmental dynamics (team 9). These mainly political dynamics force teams to be up to date with respect to external developments and to create a vision on how they can anticipate (team 4) on possible changes in demand or working methods for example.

##### ***Emotional well-being***

An important success factor of team effectiveness according to the teams is the ability to create a safe and emotionally healthy work environment. Social workers are facing a variety of heavy problems every day, which can be tough sometimes. Therefore, the teams argue that it is of great importance that team members can express their feelings

and share their cases with each other. This means that social workers not only need professional support, but also emotional support from team members in order to guarantee emotional well-being, which is needed to function properly.

Table 11. Team effectiveness: critical success factors

Critical success factors	
Network position	Teams indicate that if they are highly embedded in the network, they can work more preventive as problems can be solved more quickly or can be recognized in an earlier stadium.
Adaptive capacity	In order to be able to operate effectively in a highly turbulent and dynamic environment, the teams have to be highly flexible and adaptive.
Emotional well-being	Social workers not only need professional support, but also need emotional support from team members in order to function effectively.

As discussed above, the respondents indicate that, besides production and waiting time, there are several more indicators and critical success factors that could indicate whether a team is effective or not. Concerning the outcome measures, customer satisfaction seems important as the financing depends on the satisfaction of the financier, client satisfaction provides an indication of the quality of the treatment and network partner satisfaction provided information on how a team cooperates with network partners. This elaboration is relevant since these success factors and indicators could also be influenced by both types of autonomy. The same goes for the critical success factors. It seems that teams of social workers need to be aware of their network position, should be adaptive as a result of the dynamic environment, and as a result of the emotionally heavy work, attention should be paid to the emotional well-being of the social workers. Cohen and Ledfort (1994) argue that different predictors could lead to different outcomes. In order to provide a complete overview of the different mechanisms behind autonomy and team effectiveness, it is important to include different the possible outcomes and success factors discussed above. Therefore, in the next sections, attention will be paid to the additional critical success factors and indicators of team effectiveness discussed above.

### 4.2.2 Individual autonomy

As already discussed in the previous section, all the teams that participated in this research scored high on the individual autonomy scale. The results that can be derived from the interviews are not contradicting these findings. Table 12 provides an overview of the different possible aspects of individual autonomy as suggested by the respondents.

Table 12. Individual autonomy

Concept		Categories	N	Example quotes
Individual autonomy	Autonomy	Planning	15	“I make my own appointments with clients” (Team 1)
		Working methods	5	“I am able to decide which method I use when helping the client” (senior social worker, Team 5)
		Location	3	“I can choose on which location I work” (Team 5)
		Goal setting	2	“We have an individual annual plan. I can set goals for my professional development” (Team 11)
		Managing caseload	2	“I decide which clients I see, how many clients I see and when I see them” (Senior social worker, team 7)
		Network partners	3	“Projects with network partners. What contacts do I engage in and who do I not contact and how much time do I invest in maintaining contact with network partners” (Team 2)
	Restrictions	Legal frameworks	5	“We are coping with several national regulations, like reporting code for domestic violence” (Team 7)
		Professional frameworks	2	“there is code of Ethics for social workers, which is not a very clear framework, but is predominantly about how to cope with moral dilemma’s et cetera. It is more is process guide.” (Manager)

The respondents define individual autonomy as the extent to which they are free in fulfilling their responsibilities as a social worker. Most respondents refer to making their own planning, the freedom to choose which working method they use, on which location they work and how much time they invest in a client. A respondent states: “I can plan when and where I make my appointments; I am able to organize my work in a way it fits me best”. The social workers as well as the managers explain that a high level of individual autonomy is an important characteristic of social work in general, because social work is characterized by individual treatment and the professionals are responsible for the client’s treatment program. A social worker states: “I think you

would not be able to exert this profession without freedom”. The autonomy granted to the individual professionals mainly focuses on the interaction with the client, rather than on the execution of policy related tasks. Social workers manage their own caseload and are responsible for a certain production requirement based on the amount of hours they work for the organization and the production agreement with the financier. The production requirements are included in an individual annual plan that the social workers make themselves. In this annual plan social workers describe how they want to develop professionally during the year as well. The annual plan has to be approved by the manager. Not all the teams indicate that they write an individual annual plan. Some teams state that the management does not always check if the social workers actually make an annual plan.

When asking the respondents what the restrictions are of their individual autonomy, they often refer to making decisions with financial consequences or situations with network partners when strategic decisions have to be made. In those situations they call for the help of a manager: “we want social workers to have contact with the local government, but sometimes there are conversations that have to be held on management level”, a manager states. The social workers indicate that there is no clear framework (i.e. no clear guideline) about what is their responsibility and what is the manager’s responsibility in this respect. This does not mean that the social workers do not maintain contacts with other organizations, they do, but generally in the context of helping a client. There are also institutional pressures limiting the individual autonomy of the professionals. As the manager states: “there are legal frameworks and there is a code of Ethics for example. Concerning the code of Ethics, this is not a clear framework, but functions more as a guide for moral dilemmas. These are all frameworks limiting the individual autonomy of social workers, on which NIM has no influence as an organization”. Also, there is a reference index and a reporting code for domestic violence, all developed by (local) governments and influencing the social workers’ individual autonomy. This also counts for registration. All the individual social workers are obliged to report in detail what they have done. This means that they have to justify every single hour they worked. This is on the one hand a justification towards the financier, to show how the money is spent. On the other hand it is a monitoring tool for management. The respondents often perceive

this as a paradox: they are free to do whatever they want, but they have to report on every single action they perform.

In general there is not much difference between the teams concerning the amount of individual autonomy. As will be described in the next section on team autonomy, there are differences between the teams working in the city as compared to the teams working in the region. All the teams working in the region work for a separate local government, whereas the teams in the city all work for the same financier. This results in the region teams maintaining more direct contact with the financier, whereas in the city the manager mainly maintains the contacts with the municipality. With respect to goal setting, the production targets are set by the organization in agreement with the financier, so the individual social workers have no influence on what seems to be the most important goal that should be achieved: production. This, while the respondents indicated in the survey that they can set their own goals.

#### 4.2.3 Team autonomy

Like on the individual autonomy scale, the respondents report high average scores on the team autonomy scale in the survey. Only team 5 and team 6 indicate moderately high scores on team effectiveness. Also, the previous section showed that the individual social workers almost run their own shop. Therefore, it is interesting to see what are actually team tasks they have to exert and, of course, to what extent they feel autonomous as a team in exerting these tasks. Table 13 provides an overview of the suggested aspects of team autonomy.

Table 13. Team autonomy

Concept	Categories	Categories	N	Example quotes
Team autonomy	Autonomy	Initiating activities	5	“Starting a group for clients” (Senior social worker, team 4)
		Distribution of tasks	11	“We determine as a team the distribution of tasks” (Team 5)
		Goal setting	11	“The teams make an annual plan” (Manager)
		Maintaining contact with network partners	6	“We deliberate a lot with network partners, general practitioners. We decide as a team how often we deliberate and with how many we go.” (team 2)

		Contact with customer	4	“We have direct contact with our customer” (Team 11)
		Professional development	6	“You help each other as a team to increase your expertise” (Team 6)
		Managing waiting list	3	“We take care for the clients that belong to our working area and are on our waiting list” (Team 7)
	Restrictions	Organizational frameworks	8	“If it is about money, money and resources” (Team 3)
		Legal frameworks	2	“It are mainly the legal things we <i>must</i> do” (Team 3)
		Unclear roles and tasks (management vs. operation)	2	“We actually never made any agreements on who does what” (Team 10)

Team 7 indicates, “The team tasks [that we exert autonomously] are, in my opinion, defined in how the working areas are divided. We are Team 7, so all the clients who belong to this area, belong to Team 7 and Team 7’s waiting list. We are responsible for helping these clients. And indeed, we have individual production targets, but we also have a team production target and a city production target”. The team production target, however, is the sum of the individual targets. Defining it as a team responsibility means that if one team member drops out, the team has to figure out how it achieves the production target. The team members distribute work among each other themselves. Every team has a senior social worker; this senior social worker is responsible for the information transfer between the manager and the team. This means that the manager on a strategic level instructs the senior social worker with (operational) tasks the team has to perform.

The senior social worker, then, is responsible for taking these tasks to the team. The senior social workers are free in how they distribute the tasks; they can choose to deliberate with the team members on who is going to perform the tasks, or can assign every task to a separate team member. The majority of the senior social workers discuss the tasks during a team meeting with the team before distribution. With respect to team meetings, not all teams make the agenda for the meetings. Team 5, for example, state that they “are changing the agenda setting procedure. They want to exert more influence on what there will be discussed during team meetings. Currently, the management assistant provides us with the date and agenda of the meeting,

motivated by the manager”. This way of preparing team meetings has a more top-down character as compared to other teams, mainly region teams. This is also a consequence of teams in the city are less aware of the developments on policy level as compared to the team in the region, who have direct contact with the local government.

Next to the collective production target, the teams are responsible for writing an annual plan for their team. They formulate their goals autonomously, but they have to be approved by the manager. “This year we are focusing on a alternative working method for example. Because there is so much going on in the environment because of the transitions in youth care and how social work is organized. It forces us to seek for collaborations with network partners”. Concerning these collaborations with network partners, the majority of the teams state that this is also a part of their annual plan: “maintaining contact with the different stakeholders”. There is one big difference between the teams with respect to maintaining contact with external stakeholders: the majority of the teams in the region have direct contact with the local government (i.e. the financier), whereas the teams in the city do not. This distinction can be explained due to the fact that the local government of the city otherwise would have six different contacts representing one organization, but it indicates that the teams in the region have more freedom in maintaining contacts with external stakeholders. Based on individual specialization or qualities, the tasks formulated in the annual plan are distributed among the team members. The team members are responsible for providing feedback on the progress of ‘their part of the annual plan’. Team 6 indicates that without an annual plan, they would do a lot less together. Part of the annual plan is also the production target. As stated in the previous section, this target is not set by the team, but by the organization.

An important team function is to watch over professional development. Every week every team has a meeting where it discusses individual cases in order to get input from colleague professionals. There is one professional supervisor at NIM, assisting the teams in their professional development. Some teams make more use of the professional supervisor than other teams, meaning that some teams do not always invite the supervisor for the meetings. Also, during these meetings, there is a difference between the teams in terms of how the meeting is organized. Who is the



chairman of the meeting for example; in some teams, the supervisor leads the discussion and other teams think it is obvious that a team member is the chairman. This also counts for the earlier mentioned team meetings; the teams in the region provide their own chairman, whereas in the city the manager predominantly presides at the meetings.

The teams are to a certain extent autonomous in how they exert their tasks as described above. However, the teams indicate that the organization determines how much time they spend on their team activities. NIM, in an agreement with the financier, has determined how social workers must distribute their time. This is what several respondents refer to as the paradox of the policy concerning autonomy. Social workers are expected to spend 65% of their time directly on helping clients (“direct time”) and the remaining 35% on meetings and team activities that do not involve direct treatment for the client (“indirect time”). As the time is distributed relatively, this means that team members with smaller contracts sometimes simply cannot spend time on team activities because they have to spend time on their clients: “everybody thinks it is important to meet each other, but the distribution of time makes it difficult for people” (team 3). Some of the teams argue that they do not worry about this distribution of time, as the manager does not monitor it (except when production is low).

The distribution of time can be checked by the management with the use of a registration system the social workers use to justify their worked hours. The direct time resembles more or less the individual autonomy where the indirect time represents the team autonomy related activities. Actually, the financier and the management have already defined how the teams should prioritise the two levels of autonomy. “You have to keep in mind: I have this number of clients I have to help, so I cannot spend too much time on other activities. I think everybody keeps in mind this ratio”. In reality, the organization is not monitoring the ratio strictly. The reason according to the managers is that the organization wants to be able to report on what the social workers are spending their time on towards the financier. The managers are not so much interested in the specific time investment per activity, but they do want to be able to see *what* they are spending their time on.

#### 4.2.4 Individual autonomy and team effectiveness

In line with previous research, the qualitative data suggests that a relation between the two types of autonomy and team effectiveness can be suggested. Several possible mechanisms can be suggested concerning the relation between individual autonomy and team effectiveness. As already mentioned in previous sections, social work is to a large extent an individualistic profession. But, what are the consequences of providing the individual social workers such a high level of autonomy as described in the previous section? In table 14, the different mechanisms are presented in a table, illustrated by quotes and the number of times the mechanisms are suggested by the respondents. Figures 2, 3 and 4 provide a conceptual presentation of the findings.

Table 14. Individual autonomy and team effectiveness

Relation		Categories	N	Example quotes
Individual autonomy and team effectiveness	Positive consequences	Perceived responsibility	5	“You have more responsibility, that is something I notice” (Team 4)
		Perceived trust	4	“For me, it shows that the organization trusts me” Senior social worker, Team 3)
		Motivation	2	“It enhances your motivation” (senior social worker, Team 4)
		Job satisfaction	8	“It has a lot to do with my job satisfaction. I’m able to be involved with tasks that appeal to me and that make use of my strengths. Through providing me this freedom, the organization maximizes the benefits from me as a professional”. (Senior social worker, Team 5)
	Flexibility	2	“I think your flexibility increases, which makes it easier to make appointments with team colleagues or exchange clients. It just makes me more flexible” (Senior social worker, Team 3)	
	Negative consequences	Cohesiveness	9	“Everybody is working on different islands” (Team, 5)
		Intra-team coordination	5	“We have to put a lot of effort in finding each other and knowing from each other what we are doing precisely” (Senior social worker, Team 5)
Emotional well-being		2	“The danger is that you can go too far in your individual autonomy. Because you are able to do all the work you see, I sometimes exceed my own limits” (Team 11)	

#### 4.2.4.1 Positive consequences

##### *Motivation & job satisfaction*

Due to the large amount of freedom in exerting their tasks, the team members experience high levels of perceived responsibility. As a result of the fact that they manage their own caseload and therefore have their “own” clients for who they decide how the treatment program will look like. They feel responsible for their “own shop”. As a result of this perceived responsibility, the social workers explain they intensify their efforts for the team and the organization, which increases the team performance in terms of production. In terms of production, because the “own shop” of social workers is part of the team’s production target. It is not clear what the effects are on the other aspects of team effectiveness that are described in the previous section.

A respondent from team 3 points out that the amount of autonomy “is an indicator of the amount of trust the organization has in us as professionals”. The teams indicate that they value this attitude of the organization to a large extent.

As a result of the abovementioned perceived trust and responsibility, respondents argue that they experience high levels of job satisfaction and internal work motivation. A respondent from team 5 states: “it has a lot to do with my job satisfaction. I’m able to be involved with tasks that appeal to me and that make use of my strengths. Through providing me this freedom, the organization maximizes the benefits from me as a professional”. Two teams explicitly suggest that individual autonomy could influence team effectiveness as a result of an increase in internal work motivation. The perceived responsibility seems to motivate the individual team members, which could result in members putting more effort in exerting their tasks.

Through analyzing and interpreting the data, we could suggest (as presented in Figure 2) that granting individual team members a large amount of individual autonomy may increase their perceived responsibility and perceived trust, which in turn may result in a higher level of job satisfaction and motivation. A higher job satisfaction, in turn, could result in social workers putting more effort in their jobs, leading to higher production. As stated in the previous section, the image towards network partners is of great importance. Higher levels of job satisfaction may lead to

a more positive image towards stakeholders as social workers a more positive about their organization and enthusiastic when representing the organization.

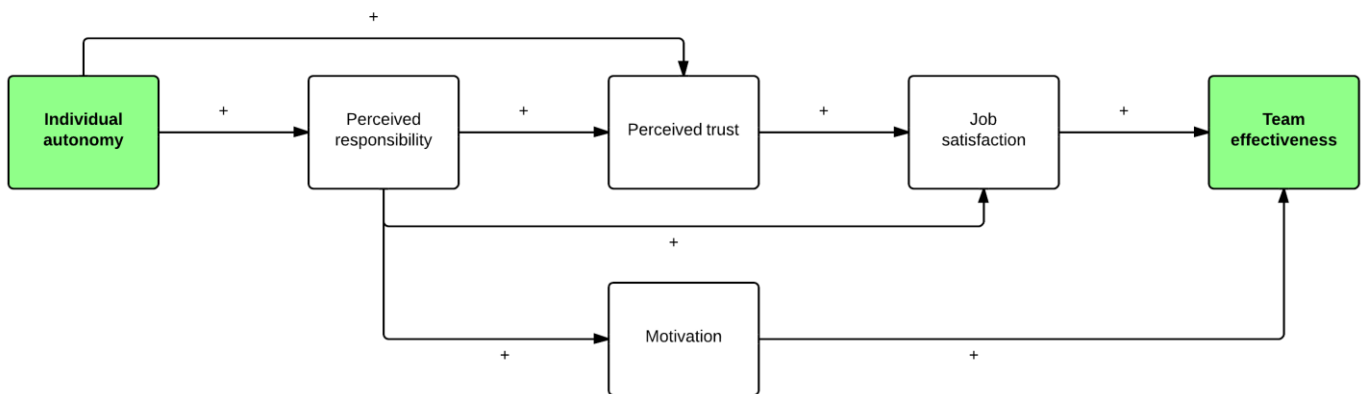


Figure 2. Individual autonomy and job satisfaction

### Flexibility

As mentioned earlier the respondents state that they need to be autonomous in order to be able to adjust to the clients needs. The perceived autonomy allows professionals to be flexible in, for example, making appointments and react on questions that ask for immediate action. The fact that the professionals do not have to ask for permission every time they face this type of situations increases the decision making speed and the production. “I can influence situations and make my own decisions about the treatment, which makes everything go much faster as compared to a situation where the manager has to approve on every decision you want to make, that is way too bureaucratic in my opinion”.

As shown in Figure 3, based on the interviews, there is an indication that individual autonomy makes social workers individually more flexible. This could lead to an increase in decision making speed, which in turn could lead to an increase in production as the social worker is able to manage their caseload adequately and helps more people. This may also lead to an increase in stakeholder satisfaction as the social worker can more easily react on changing demands from the environment. It should be noted that only two teams refer specifically to an increase in flexibility as mechanism in the relation between individual autonomy and team effectiveness.

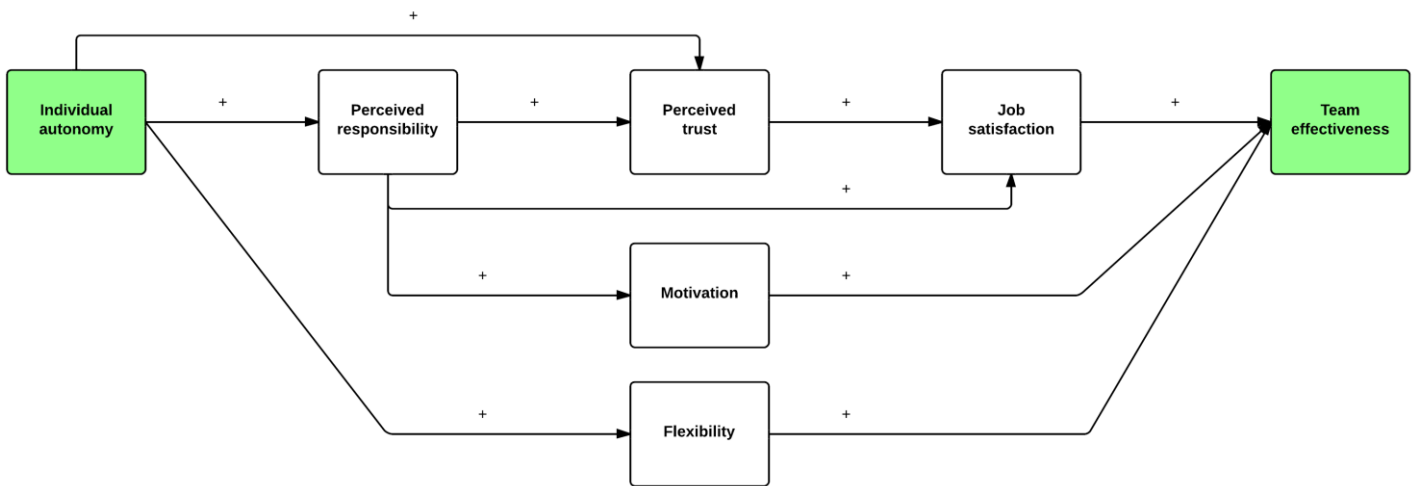


Figure 3. Individual autonomy and flexibility

#### 4.2.4.2 Negative consequences

##### *Cohesiveness and emotional well-being*

A negative consequence of the high level of individual autonomy the team members perceive may be that the team tends to get fragmented, which could lead to a decrease in team cohesiveness (Figure 4). Especially the city teams indicate that their team is to a large extent fragmented because individuals manage their own caseload and decide where and when they work or make appointments. A team member from team 6 states: “the team cohesion is different and that is something I regret. That is due to the fact that we tend to get fragmented”. Because of the possible decrease in cohesiveness as a result of the high amount of individual autonomy, there is a possibility of a decrease in emotional well-being. Social work is an emotional heavy profession and team members indicate that they need emotional support from their team members in order to deliver quality. The individual autonomy, albeit indirectly, makes sharing feelings and discussing heavy or difficult cases with team members difficult. A social worker states: “It is not that we do not want to, the intention to help each other exists, but is just so difficult because we do not see each other a lot”.

As presented in Figure 4, individual autonomy could lead to fragmentation, which may negatively impact the team’s cohesiveness, which in turn may cause individual team members experience difficulties in finding each other to share feelings and get emotional support, possibly influencing their emotional well-being. This could impact their professional behaviour as they are not able to process their feelings from

previous sessions with other clients, which subsequently could impact production and client satisfaction.

### *Intra-team coordination*

Important for the responsibility as a team to position itself within a network is that the team members mutually coordinate their activities. As a consequence of the high amount of individual autonomy, respondents indicate that they have to put a lot of effort into “finding each other” in order to coordinate the team tasks. We could suggest that because of the individual autonomy, individual team members are able to run their own shop. Given the fact they have and manage their own caseload, they actually *could* run their own ‘shop’. Sometimes the team members do not even see each other for more than a couple of weeks. “Because you manage your own agenda, your own caseload, have your own appointments with network partners et cetera, you have to plan meetings together in order to coordinate activities. We notice that we tend to loose each other if we don’t. Otherwise we are running two separate shops”. Another social worker states: “there are a lot of situations that I really have no idea what my team members are doing”.

Due to the individual autonomy, it seems difficult to coordinate activities and be able to maintain overview on what is happening on the team level. This could lead to individuals focussing on the same things without knowing from each other, making the teams less effective. Referring to the previous section, the possible increase in team fragmentation, and therefore the team cohesiveness, and lack of intra-team coordination could impact several of the aspects of team effectiveness as mentioned by the respondents. Production could be influenced as a result of missed chances to help each other out through connecting each other’s networks or clients, which could increase the speed of the treatment program (e.g. if two social workers have a couple of clients with the same problems, they could start a group). Not coordinating activities may also lead to telling different stories at the various network partners which could influence the network partner satisfaction.

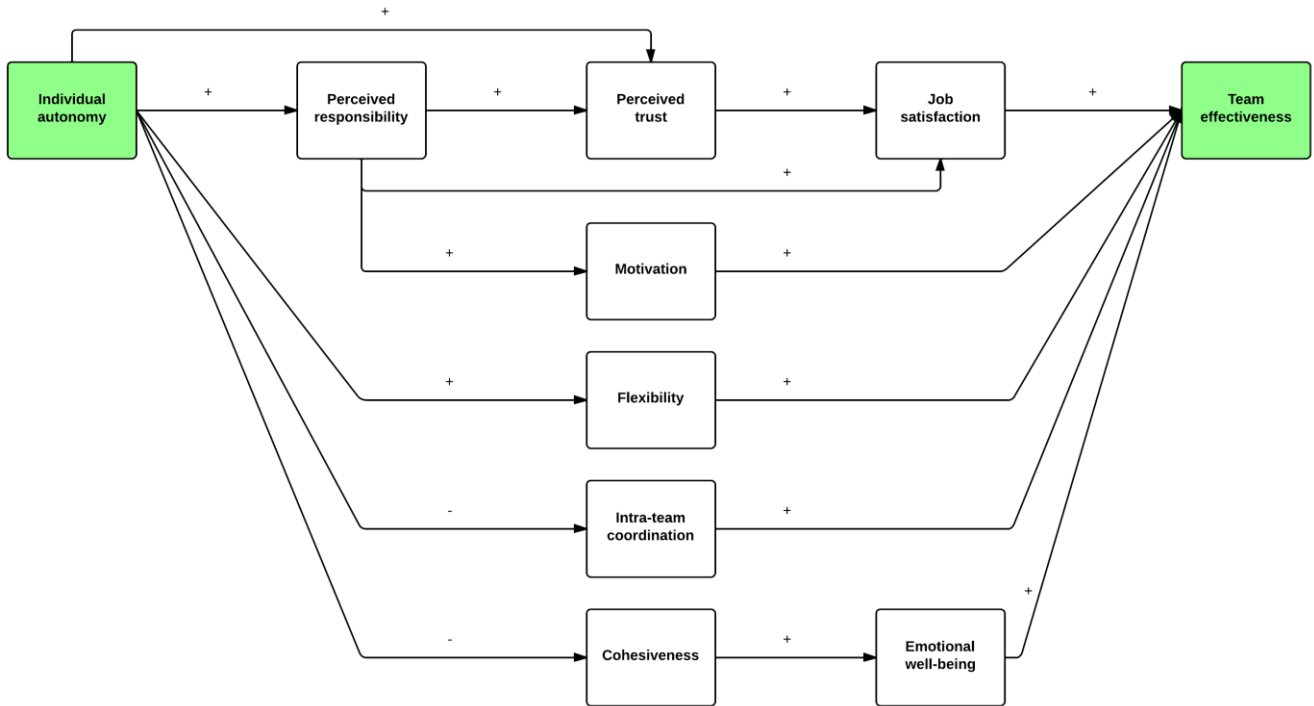


Figure 4. Individual autonomy and team effectiveness

#### 4.2.5 Team autonomy and team effectiveness

This section describes the qualitative findings regarding the relation between team autonomy and team effectiveness. In Table 13, presented on the next page, the different mechanisms are presented in a table, illustrated by quotes and the number of times the mechanisms are indicated by the respondents. Figure 5, 6 and 7 provide a conceptual presentation of the findings.

Table 13. Team autonomy and team effectiveness

Relation		Categories	N	Example quotes
Team autonomy and team effectiveness	Positive consequences	Perceived responsibility	2	“If we organize things ourselves, that creates a certain responsibility, which causes us show commitment to what we do and it is fun! “ (Senior social worker, team 4)
		Motivation	4	I think it is motivating when it is your own plan. If you must do something, you immediately create a feeling of resistance” (Team 7)
		Job satisfaction	4	“A decrease in team autonomy could lead a disruption of job satisfaction. That leads to more ill people” (team 6)
		Decision making speed	3	“I think we can arrange things much faster as compared to when we have to wait for permission of management” (Team 4)
	Negative consequences	Workload	4	“Sometimes I get the idea that too much is expected of us.” (Team 1)
		Motivation	2	“It has its bright sides, but it can also make us indifferent. The feeling that we do not care anymore, the feeling that we are left to our fate” (Team 10)
	Factors influencing the relation	Team stability	4	“(…) a lot of changes in formation, the stability. I’ve been here since June, we had some teambuilding and some time ago we made a real team decision” (Team 1)
		Intra-team coordination	6	“Coordination within the team increases the quality. The client gets the help he/she needs” (Team 6)
		Team composition	4	“I think an important factor for the success of a team, is the composition of and the culture within the team, that is of great influence on the success of a self-managing team” (Team 4)

#### 4.2.5.1 Positive consequences

##### Motivation & job satisfaction

Like with individual autonomy, the respondents argue that an increased level of team autonomy results in higher levels of perceived responsibility. A senior social worker tells: “If we are organizing things or arranging things, we feel responsible and committed. And, it is fun! It is something that motivates us. If you *must* do something, if everything would be imposed by management, that would mean you have less influence as a team. Then, why would you even care?”. “I would experience a lot less



responsibility if the organization would grant us less autonomy than they do now”, states the senior social worker of team 4. The perceived responsibility may influence their motivation and job satisfaction. Three teams indicate that they get more motivated and four teams suggest that they are more satisfied. There could be overlap in teams here, as motivation and job satisfaction are closely related. Only two teams indicated specifically that they experience higher levels of perceived responsibility, but this could also be the case in teams where they suggest a direct relation between team autonomy and motivation or job satisfaction. Motivation and job satisfaction could subsequently lead to team members putting more effort in exerting their tasks, which could positively influence team effectiveness in terms of production. In addition, an increase in job satisfaction and motivation could lead to team members being more positive about the organization, which could lead to a more positive image towards external stakeholders.

#### *Decision making speed*

Team 4 state: “I think we can arrange things faster than when we have to ask for permission every time. When things have to be organized we just divide the tasks and it gets done”. Team 7 suggest that due to the high amount of team autonomy they are able to adapt to environmental dynamics more quickly. “We are able to pick up signals from the neighbourhood and it [team autonomy] enables us to be responsive” (team 7). This could be a result of an increase in decision making speed which may be influenced by team autonomy.

There is an indication that decision making speed has an impact on a team’s adaptive capacity, which is described as a critical success factor of team effectiveness in the previous section (Figure 5). This, as the teams do not have to wait for approval from management and therefore can take action when needed. Furthermore, an increase in decision making speed could result in higher production as the social workers can autonomously deliberate on situations with clients and help them more quickly.

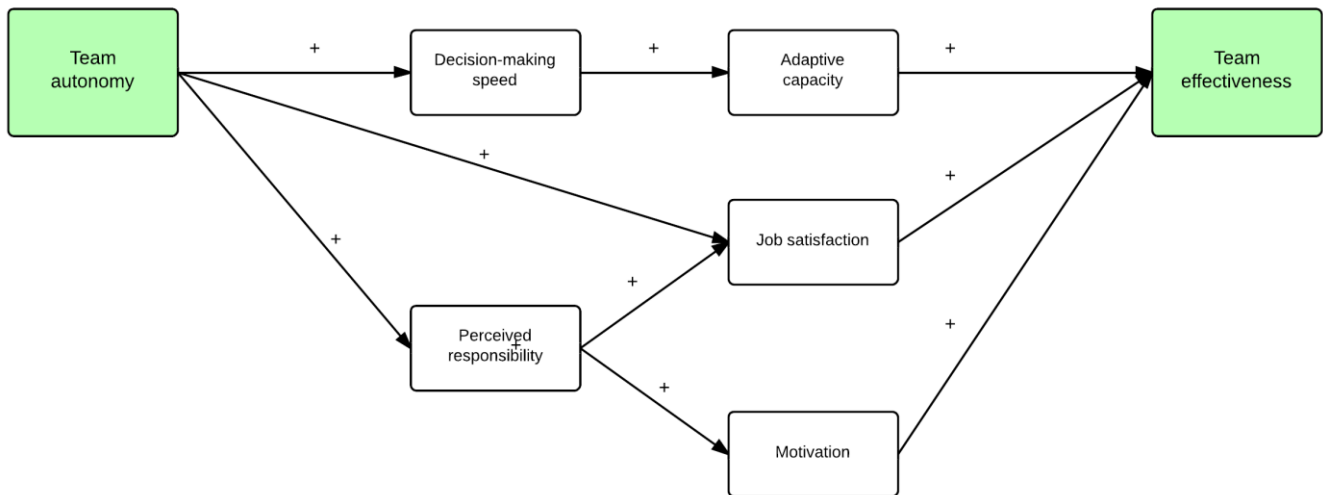


Figure 5. Positive consequences of team autonomy

#### 4.2.5.2 Negative consequences

##### *Workload*

Being autonomous to a certain extent also means additional tasks alongside the regular operational tasks as a social worker. “Because of the team autonomy we have to meet each other a lot more often en that is difficult sometimes. Writing the annual plan for example would be a lot easier on your own”. Because team effectiveness is measured in terms of production, the execution of additional team tasks does not directly result into an increase in production and is therefore sometimes perceived as ‘extra work’ instead of part of the team responsibility. This means that an increase in team autonomy may lead to additional tasks and therefore workload, which in turn may lead to less production. This, because the additional tasks do not have a direct effect on team production, but focus more on the other indicators mentioned in the elaboration on team effectiveness like external stakeholder satisfaction and critical success factors such as the team’s network position.

##### *Motivation*

Not all the social workers show the same attitude towards team autonomy. There are some respondents who are critical to the reason behind the strategic choice of making teams increasingly autonomous. Some of them have the feeling that in some cases the managers just say: “figure it out”. Others think it is just a justification of a cutback in management. The manager illustrates the teams’ attitude towards autonomy as she speaks about how the teams dealt with a problem she introduced. The teams got the

assignment to find a solution for the problem and the teams reacted totally different. “Team X handles it, team X handles it, except for team 7. They first start protesting: we are so busy already; we have a long waiting list and now this.” The manager said: “this pattern is defining your team; every time something happens or if something is asked, every time your reaction is the same”. Hereby, the manager illustrates the different attitudes towards being autonomous; some teams feel motivated when they perceive the freedom to autonomously solve a problem and other teams want the problem to be solved or just want to be told what to do. It provides also an indication that due to the increased workload mentioned above, team members could become less motivated as they get more responsibilities and therefore cannot focus solely on their tasks as a social worker.

An increase in team autonomy could possibly lead to a decrease in motivation as a result of a negative attitude towards team autonomy and the possible increase in workload (Figure 6). This, in turn, could result in team members putting less effort in exerting their tasks. This could result in less production and longer waiting times. In addition, a decrease in motivation may also lead to team members paying less attention to team tasks that, for example, include focusing on the team’s network position, which is a critical success factor for team effectiveness.

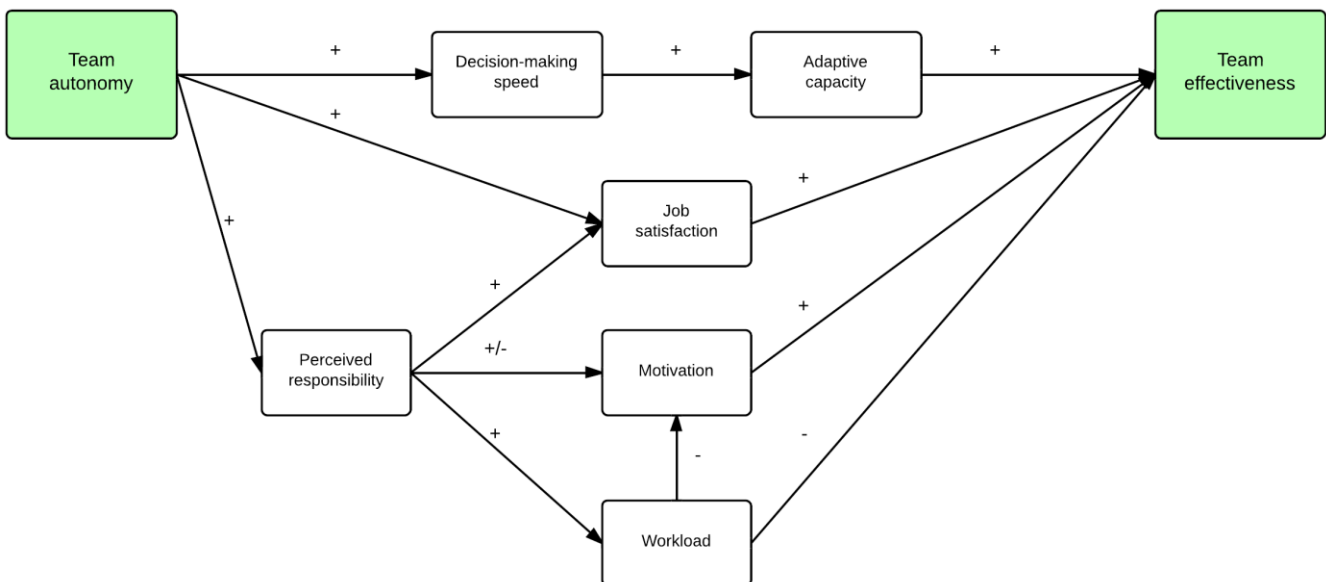


Figure 6. Negative consequences of team autonomy

#### ***4.2.5.3 Factors influencing the relation between team autonomy and team effectiveness***

Next to mediating mechanisms in the relation between team autonomy and team effectiveness, the teams also indicated several factors that are of importance in the relation between team autonomy and team effectiveness (Figure 7).

##### *Team stability*

Next to team composition, the team stability is found to be of importance for the effective functioning of team autonomy. Team stability can either be positively moderating the effect between team autonomy and performance or negatively moderating the relation. Team stability is argued to have a positive effect due to the fact that team members know each other better and therefore are more attuned to one another. On the other hand, however, a manager points out that some teams already work together for more than twenty years where individuals determine the culture and the routines of a team. With those teams, it is harder to implement higher levels of team autonomy because of the abovementioned attitude as compared to teams with younger team members. It is important to notice that the financier sees team stability as very important. Team 1 state that their local government is less satisfied as a result of a lot of changes in formation.

Team stability, thus, may have a positive influence on the relation between team autonomy and team effectiveness as team members are more attuned to each other, which may increase the quality of internal collaboration. However, team stability may also negatively influence the relationship between team autonomy and team effectiveness as increasing team autonomy in teams that are stuck to old routines could lead to resistance to change, which in turn may lead to a less effective functioning of team autonomy.

##### *Team composition*

The teams also indicate that several team characteristics are of importance. The team composition for example, is according to the senior social worker of team 5 of great influence on the relation between autonomy and team effectiveness. “You have to take into account the type of team members in your team. There should be an organizer and an executor; there should not be only people who love to deliberate on

everything”. Team 4 as well argue that the composition and the culture within a team are essential. As team composition is not a variable that varies, but can consist of multiple factors influencing the relation, it is not clear what the respondents actually mean or need in order for the team autonomy to be effective. There is just a small empirical evidence for team composition to influence the relation, although it can be theoretically argued that a team composition could be of influence as described.

#### *Intra-team coordination*

Next to team composition and team stability, intra-team coordination is suggested as a condition for team autonomy to work. Team 6 state: “intra-team coordination fosters the quality of the team activities. This will result in the client getting the right help that is needed”. Also, coordination is of importance, as the individual social workers all have their own specialism. Team 3 suggestst that these specialisms need to coordinate their activities in order to maintain overview and foster intra-team collaboration.

As team autonomy requires teams to divide the work among the individual team members, the intra-team coordination seems essential for maintaining overview and making optimal use of the different networks of the individual social workers with different specialisms. This coordination ensures that social workers can provide the right help for their client. In terms of team effectiveness, this may result in better production and client satisfaction, because the clients can be helped more adequately. Also, on a less operational level, a team is more able to adapt to changes if they coordinate activities when picking up signals from the environment.

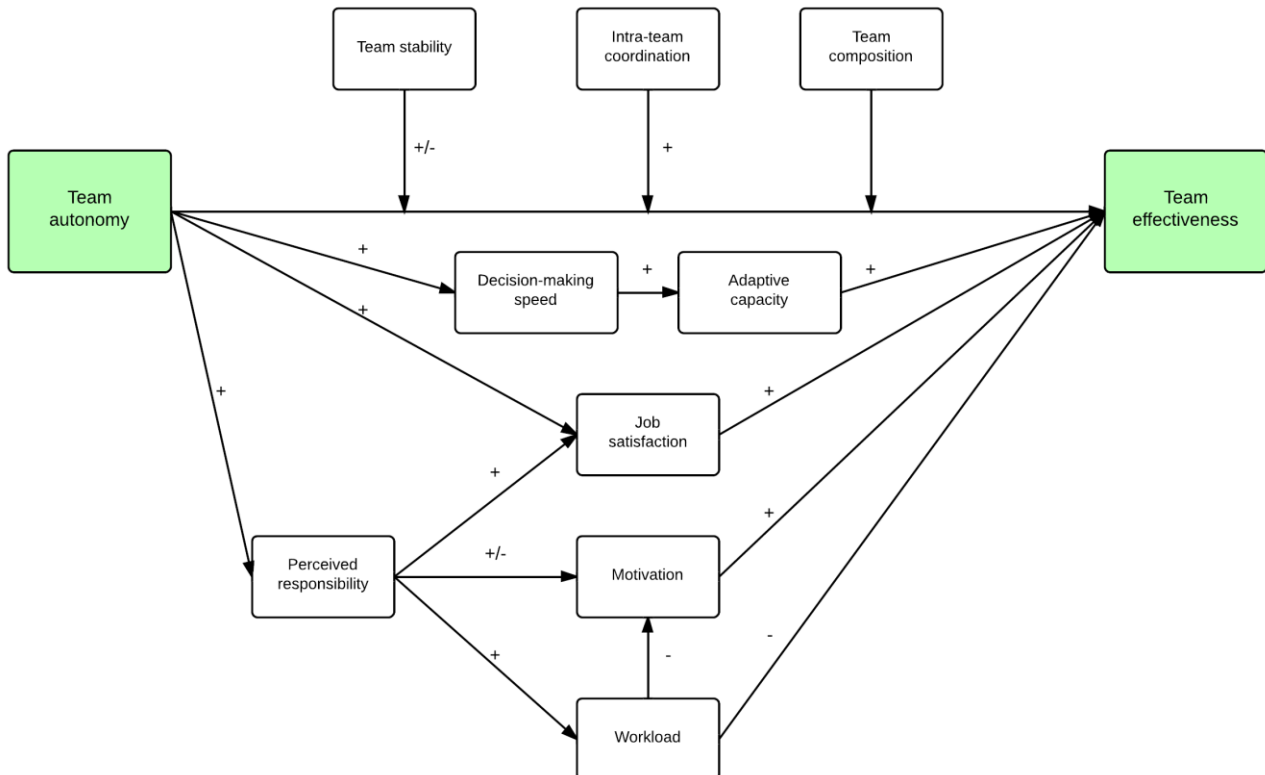


Figure 7. Team autonomy and team effectiveness

#### 4.2.6 Team autonomy, individual autonomy and team effectiveness

In the previous sections the separate relations between individual autonomy and team effectiveness and team autonomy and team effectiveness are discussed. In this section it will be discussed how these two separate relations interact and what could be possible factors influencing the simultaneous effect of individual and team autonomy on team effectiveness. As the teams experience high levels of individual autonomy as well as team autonomy, the findings are based on mechanisms that occur when both levels of autonomy are high.

##### *Intra-team coordination*

As been pointed out in the previous section, due to the high level of perceived individual autonomy, the individual team members have less face-to-face contact and the teams tend to get fragmented. As a result, 8 of the 11 teams experience difficulties in coordinating their team activities, which in turn leads to a possible decrease in team effectiveness. A team member from team 3 states: “it is very difficult to arrange a

meeting with each other [due to the fragmentation resulting from the perceived individual autonomy], but if we are together eventually we can arrange things much more effective”. As discussed in the elaboration on the relation between team autonomy and team effectiveness, the intra-team coordination is of importance for the team autonomy to work. A high level of individual autonomy, here, may negatively affect the functioning of team autonomy as the team tasks that result from the high level of team autonomy are more difficult to coordinate (and therefore exert) due to the high level of individual autonomy (Figure 8).

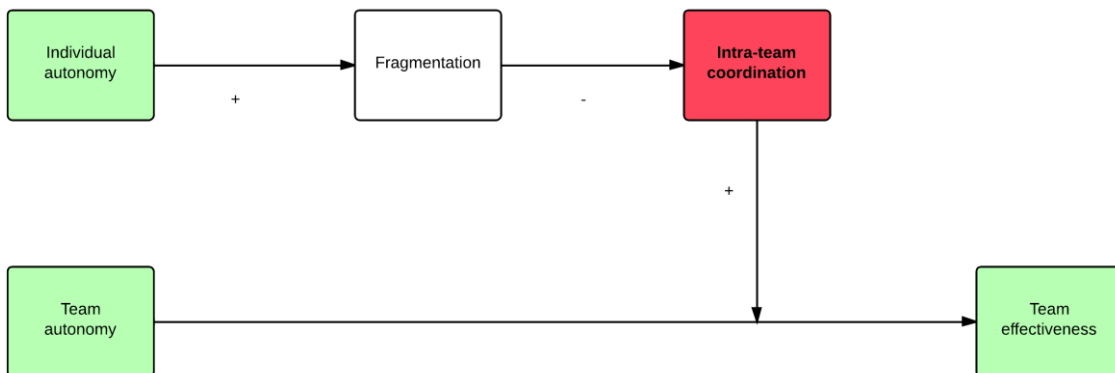


Figure 8. Intra-team coordination

### Team proximity

The abovementioned difficulty in coordinating activities as a result of the occurring team fragmentation, could be influenced by the team proximity of the teams (Figure 9). Team proximity is defined by Chong et al. (2012:5) as “the degree of closeness in terms of physical distance between team members”. Team proximity is where the teams at NIM truly vary. As been mentioned earlier, the city teams differ from the teams in the region in terms of sharing a common location. The teams in the city have multiple locations per team. However, these locations are used by individual social workers and most of the time there is not even room for more than two social workers. The teams in the region, on the contrary, all share a common location and meet each other there every day. Team 9, a team from the region, argues: “I think that other teams are to a much lesser extent a real team as compared to us, because we share a common location. If you do not have a common location, the work becomes very individualistic. That is a very big difference”, indicating that the team cohesiveness suffers from a low level of team proximity. An other team member from

a region team (team 3) who worked in different teams before says the following about the influence of a common location: “what struck me, was that the team autonomy here works much better because we share a location. It works better in the sense that we are much more flexible, quicker and we are supporting each other more emotionally”. In addition, the teams in the city complain about not having a shared location (low team proximity). These teams experience difficulties coordinating team activities and miss the possibility to reflect on a heavy conversation with a client. A manager does not quietly agree on the statements of the majority of the teams. The manager claims that high team proximity is not a requirement for the combination of individual and team autonomy to work, referring to a small team that still know how to find each other by planning appointments. However, respondents indicate that it just costs a lot of effort to meet each other for coordinating activities and bonding and that it is much easier when sharing a location.

Teams with a high level of team proximity indicate that they are able to coordinate team activities better and experience more cohesiveness while experiencing high levels of individual and team autonomy, which could enhance their effectiveness and the effective functioning of team autonomy. This, while teams experiencing lower levels of team proximity indicate that they have difficulties coordinating team tasks, experience less cohesiveness and miss the (emotional) support from team members as a result of the combination between high individual autonomy, high team autonomy and low team proximity. As shown in Figure 9, team proximity may influence relation between individual autonomy and cohesiveness as well as the relation between individual autonomy and intra-team coordination, and therefore could have an indirect, negative, impact on the effective functioning of team autonomy.



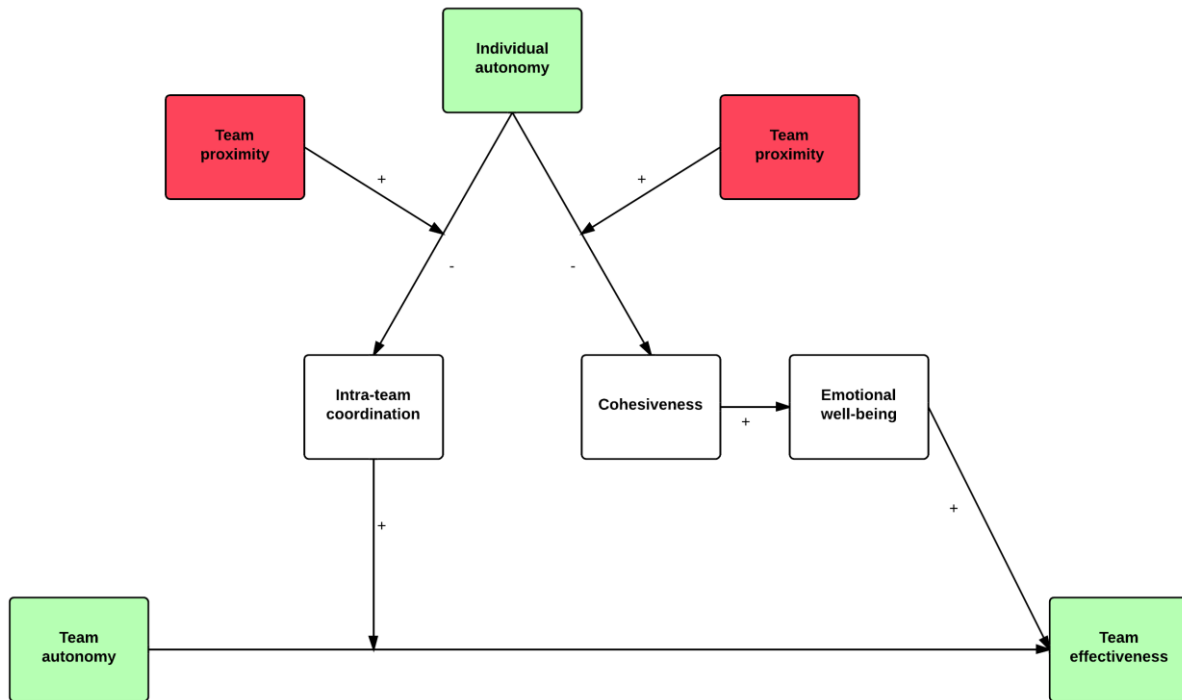


Figure 9. Team proximity

### *'Emotional' interdependence*

The results discussed above suggest that when a team perceives high levels of individual autonomy, the possibility of teams getting fragmented occurs and teams tend to experience less cohesiveness. This could be, as discussed above, reinforced by the team proximity of the teams.

It seems that the social workers, other than task interdependence, experience 'emotional interdependence'. They need emotional support because of the emotionally heavy work they do every day. As described in the team effectiveness-section, a healthy climate is suggested as a critical success factor for team effectiveness. The social workers explain that it is not a job you can do on your own. If this was not the case, the question is to what extent the teams would actually be teams using Cohen & Bailey's (1997:241) definition. This will be further discussed in the 'Recommendations' chapter. There are social workers arguing that they do not need their own team specifically for their emotional support (team 5), but can also rely on colleagues from other teams. 'Emotional' interdependence may have the same function as task interdependence as proposed by Langfred (2000) in the following way: if (task) interdependence is a characteristic of a team it indicates that members

already have to share information, which will help them in effectively being autonomous. The same counts for ‘emotional’ interdependence at NIM: the teams call or meet each other in order to share feelings or information, and at the same time they are able to share other information and coordinate activities. Also, it could enhance the cohesiveness of a team as the members share feelings, which could result in more team bonding. As with team proximity, emotional interdependence could have an influence on how individual autonomy has an impact on the effective functioning of team autonomy. Theoretically, if the teams would not be interdependent at all, the teams may be fragmented to such an extent that the team autonomy would not be effective as a result of a non-cohesive team with low intra-team coordination.

### *Motivation*

As can be derived from previous sections on the independent relations between the levels of autonomy and team effectiveness, there is an indication that individual and team autonomy are increasing the team members’ motivation. However, there are also teams that suggest that team autonomy sometimes is perceived as a result of a cutback in management or that it increases the workload, which could possibly lead to a decrease in motivation, and subsequently in team effectiveness. This could be an indication for a tension between individual and team autonomy in relation to team effectiveness (Figure 10).

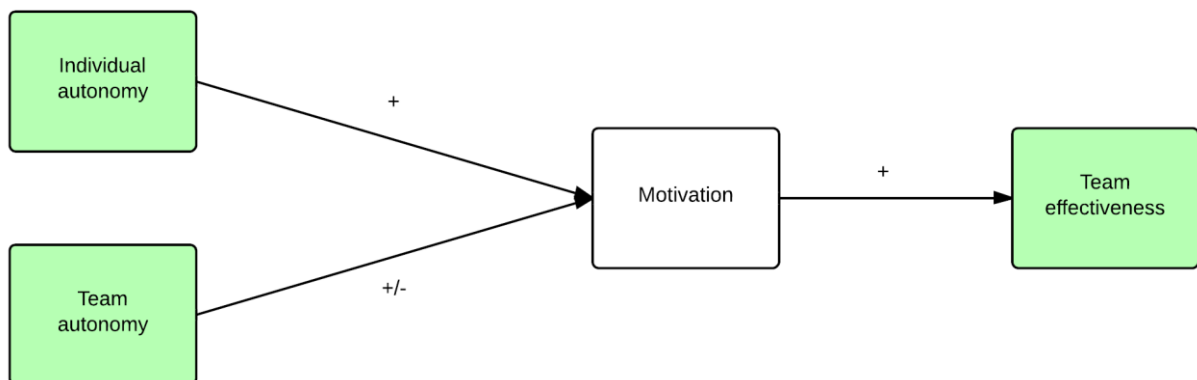


Figure 10. Motivation

## 5. Conclusion

This research aimed to explore the relationships between individual autonomy, team autonomy and team effectiveness. Based on the survey and the semi-structured individual and group interviews several conclusions can be drawn. This research used the following research question:

*How do individual and team autonomy relate to team effectiveness?*

First, it is of importance to note that no relation between the variables is found in the quantitative part of the research. No variation was found on the different levels of autonomy and no clear results can be derived from the quantitative team effectiveness measure. However, the qualitative part of the research suggests that there are indications that the relation between the two types of autonomy and team effectiveness is apparent and suggests several mechanisms mediating the relations. In addition, previous research has shown that there is a relation between the concepts (Langfred, 2000; 2004; 2005; 2007). Before focusing on the possible mechanisms that may mediate the effects of both types of autonomy on team effectiveness and discussing how specific contextual characteristics may affect these relationships, it is of importance to discuss the separate relations between both types of autonomy and team effectiveness as the mechanisms behind these separate relations form the basis for understanding how the two types of autonomy combined may influence team effectiveness. But first, the concepts used in this study are discussed as they provide insight in the specific organizational context.

### *Team effectiveness*

The quantitative part of the research does not show a clear pattern with regards to the differences in team effectiveness. The teams do show differences in average weighted production and average waiting time. However, during the qualitative part of the research the respondents suggest that these measures do not represent team effectiveness solely as these measures focus on quantity, not quality. The qualitative part of the research suggests that besides production and waiting time, (external) stakeholder satisfaction (i.e. clients, customer, network partners) and goal achievement are suggested to be of importance with respect to the measurement of the

quality delivered by the teams. There are also indications that emotional well-being, adaptive capacity and network position are critical success factors of team effectiveness. The elaboration on the concept of team effectiveness, thus, provides additional possible outcomes on which attention will be paid in the elaboration on the relations between the two types of autonomy and team effectiveness. Furthermore, this elaboration provides insight in how team effectiveness could be measured in this specific organizational context.

### ***Individual and team autonomy***

With respect to individual and team autonomy, the survey as well as the interviews indicated that all the teams experience high levels of individual autonomy. In this research, the teams define individual autonomy as the extent to which they are free in fulfilling their responsibilities as a social worker. Most respondents refer to making their own planning, the freedom to choose which working method they use, on which location they work, how much time they invest in a client and what network partners they contact during a treatment program with a client. Regarding team autonomy, the teams are responsible for the social work in the geographically defined area they are working as a team. This means that they, as a team, autonomously divide all the incoming clients among the team members and discuss on which network partners to focus on. Also, all the teams write an annual plan containing their plans for the coming year. The teams are responsible for the statements they make in the annual plan. However, there is no formal assessment on whether the teams actually achieve the goals they formulated in their annual plan. The only difference between the teams concerning the level of team autonomy is the fact that the teams in the region have more direct contacts with their network partners and customer as compared to the city teams as a result of a smaller, more focused working area. This makes the region teams more able to create a vision of what is needed in their working area and makes them more able to react autonomously on developments without the influence of a manager.

### ***Individual autonomy and team effectiveness***

Concerning the relation between individual autonomy and team effectiveness there are both possible positive and negative consequences suggested. Individual autonomy

may lead to a higher level of team effectiveness, as team members could perceive high levels of responsibility, trust, and therefore job satisfaction. The team members manage their own caseload and feel responsible for delivering quality. Because they perceive trust from their manager and the organization, they may put a lot of effort in carrying out the tasks they feel responsible for. The high level of individual autonomy motivates them and makes them satisfied with their jobs, which may increase the team productivity and therefore the team effectiveness. Also, high levels of individual autonomy could make individual team members increasingly flexible, which may enable the team members to adjust to the client's or the network partner's needs more adequately. The abovementioned outcomes can be argued to be more on the individual level. However, as the team's production target is the sum of the individual production targets, an increase in individual production leads to higher team effectiveness in terms of production.

A possible negative consequence as a result of the perceived individual autonomy could be that the teams tend to get fragmented, negatively influencing their team cohesiveness and the possibility to coordinate their team activities. This may have a negative impact on how the external stakeholders perceive the teams, possibly influencing their satisfaction. This possible decrease in cohesiveness may also affect the emotional well-being of individual team members, which is suggested as a critical success factor for team effectiveness, and the team's emotionally healthy climate as individual autonomy, albeit indirectly, makes sharing feelings and discussing heavy or difficult cases with team colleagues increasingly difficult.

### ***Team autonomy and team effectiveness***

The suggested positive outcomes of the fact that the teams perceive high levels of team autonomy are, just like with individual autonomy, the perceived trust and an increase in motivation. There are differences, though, in terms of attitude towards team autonomy influencing the motivation. There are teams suggesting that the team autonomy sometimes is perceived as a consequence of cuts in management or as a message of "figure it out", which could be interpreted as an indication of distrust in management.

Team autonomy could also result in an increase in perceived workload according to the teams. The team members have to exert additional tasks next to their operational work as a social worker. The additional tasks associated with the high amount of team autonomy do not directly result in higher production numbers, but could be beneficial for suggested critical success factors of team effectiveness such as the positioning of the team within the network or the team's adaptive capability, which indirectly could result in higher stakeholder satisfaction and even production.

There are also some indications for team characteristics to influence the relation between team autonomy and team effectiveness. Also, team stability is may be influencing the relation between team autonomy and team effectiveness. A more stable team could lead to more attuned individual social workers, but also to a too dominant team that is resistant to change. Finally, intra-team coordination is suggested as a factor influencing the functioning of team autonomy. A team that is less capable of coordinating their activities could have more difficulties in exerting their team tasks.

### ***Individual autonomy, team autonomy and team effectiveness***

The separate relations discussed above form the basis for understanding the dynamics occurring as a result of high levels of both types of autonomy. The results of this study indicate that the mechanisms explaining the independent relations between both individual and team autonomy and team effectiveness may interact, and that there could be factors influencing the combined effect of both individual and team autonomy on team effectiveness.

First, as mentioned earlier, individual autonomy may cause an increase in motivation. However, it seems that this is not always the case with regard to team autonomy as the team members experience a higher workload and not always trust the organization's intentions. A possible tension in relation to team effectiveness could arise as high levels of individual autonomy would increase the team members' motivation and an increase in team autonomy would decrease the team members' internal work motivation, assuming that internal work motivation causes an increase in team effectiveness in terms of both production and stakeholder satisfaction.

Second, the results suggest that individual autonomy could decrease the intra-team coordination between team members as a result of the fragmentation occurring due to the high level of individual autonomy. This may negatively influence the effectiveness of the high level of team autonomy as the team members could experience difficulties in coordinating the additional tasks resulting from the high level of team autonomy.

A possible factor influencing the simultaneous effect of individual and team autonomy on team effectiveness is 'team proximity'. Teams with a high level of team proximity indicate that they are able to coordinate team activities better and experience a lesser decrease in group cohesiveness while experiencing high levels of individual and team autonomy, which could enhance their effectiveness and the effective functioning of team autonomy. This, while teams experiencing lower levels of team proximity indicate that they have difficulties coordinating team tasks, experience less cohesiveness and miss the (emotional) support from team members as a result of the combination between high individual autonomy, high team autonomy and low team proximity. This study found that team proximity could be of importance in teams with high individual and high team autonomy in relation to team effectiveness. How this factor influences teams with different levels of autonomy is not clear.

Finally, the teams at NIM do not seem highly interdependent with respect to the executions of their tasks. However, there is an indication that the 'emotional interdependence' makes the social workers of a team interdependent. They need emotional support because of the emotionally heavy work they do every day. As described in the team effectiveness-section, emotional well-being is suggested as important for the effective functioning of the social workers. It could be suggested that the high level of emotional interdependence could lower the fragmentation effect of individual autonomy, increasing the possibility to coordinate team activities and the teams' cohesiveness, which may subsequently lead to an increase in the effectiveness of team autonomy and team effectiveness. However, it is not clear whether emotional interdependence indeed fosters intra-team coordination like task interdependence is suggested to do according to Langfred (2000; 2004).

## 6. Discussion

In this section, the findings of this research will be discussed in the light of previous research.

### 6.1 Theoretical implications

#### 6.1.1 Team effectiveness

This research suggested that a distinction can be made concerning the indicators of team effectiveness opted by the respondents: there are critical success factors like ‘adaptive capacity’ and ‘network position’ and outcome measures like ‘production’ and ‘stakeholder satisfaction’. Team effectiveness is a broad term that entails many different aspects and is researched in many different ways, using many different measures (e.g. Cohen and Ledford, 1994; Langfred, 2005). In their review, Cohen et al. (1997: 646) state that self-managing work team effectiveness is defined in terms of “*performance effectiveness* (e.g. controlling costs, improving productivity and quality), *employee attitudes about their quality of work life* (e.g. job satisfaction, organizational commitment) and *employee behaviour* (absenteeism)” (Figure 11).

This means that they include employee attitudes and behaviours as outcome measures. Cohen and Ledford (1994: 3-4) argue: “research on all types of work groups tends to use only one or two outcome measures, which may be misleading if different predictors are related to different outcomes“. It can, therefore, be discussed whether the distinction this research made between outcomes measures and critical success factors is appropriate and if the proposed mechanisms, thus,

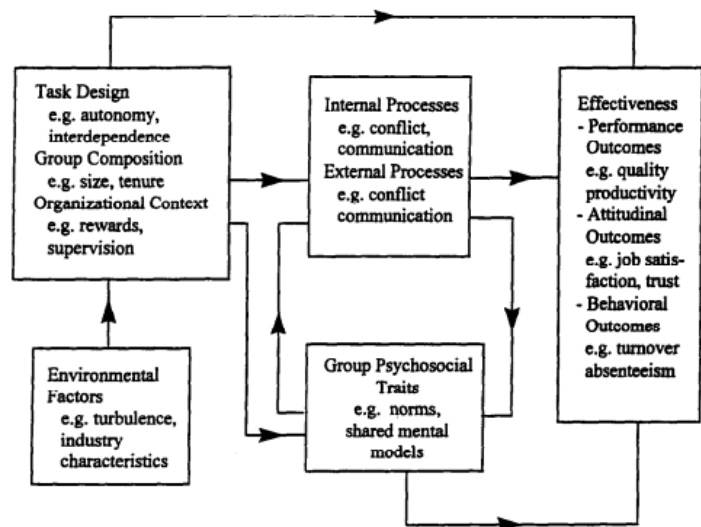


Figure 11. A Heuristic Model of Group Effectiveness. Variables listed under each category are meant as examples; they do not constitute exhaustive listing. Reprinted from: ‘What makes teams work: Group effectiveness research from the shop floor to the executive suite’ by Cohen, S. G., & Bailey, D. E. (1997). *Journal of Management*, 23(3): 244



include indicators for team effectiveness or critical success factors for team effectiveness. This study chose to use the distinction between critical success factors and outcome measures as the critical success factors could have an influence on the outcomes or be part of a mechanism in the relation between the types of autonomy and team effectiveness. In addition, referring to the definition of critical success factors suggested by Boynton & Zmud (1986: 17), critical success factors are “those few things that must go well to ensure success for a manager or an organization, and therefore, they represent those managerial or enterprise areas that must be given special and continual attention to bring about high performance”. The possible critical success factors suggested by this research match this definition and are therefore separately discussed.

### **6.1.2 Individual autonomy and team effectiveness**

With respect to the suggested mechanisms regarding the relation between individual autonomy and team effectiveness, a study by Deci and Ryan (1987) showed that individual autonomy has generally been associated with more intrinsic motivation, greater interest, less pressure and tension, more creativity, more cognitive flexibility, better conceptual learning, a more positive emotional tone, higher self-esteem, more trust, greater persistence of behavior change, and better physical and mental health than has control. The majority of these findings are in accordance with the findings of this study. However, an increase in mental health does not correspond with the suggestions made by this research. In this research, social workers indicated that they are highly dependent on the emotional support from their team members, and the high amount of individual autonomy does not foster this support, which in turn may cause a decrease of emotional well-being according to the respondents. Like Deci and Ryan (1987), Spector (1986) found in his meta-analysis that high levels of perceived individual autonomy were associated with high levels of job satisfaction, commitment, involvement, performance and motivation. An explanation for the different suggestion concerning mental health could be in the organizational specific context of social work. Emotional well-being is, as contrast to other professions, perceived as one of the main priorities in order to function properly.

The findings of this study are in accordance with the findings of Langfred (2000) concerning the decrease in team cohesiveness as a result of individual autonomy. Langfred (2000) states that in teams with high individual autonomy “it is likely that individual group members will identify themselves more in terms of their individual job and tasks, and less in terms of group membership” (p. 569). As individual autonomy also may be accompanied by reduced contact between team members, Langfred (2000: 569) also mentions that “the potential for high group cohesiveness to even develop in the first place is severely restricted in teams with high individual autonomy”. The same logic can be applied for the teams at NIM: the team members experience less contact and identify themselves to a large extent in terms of their individual jobs and tasks. They perceive themselves predominantly as a social worker. In addition, as will be discussed later, this research suggests that this decrease in cohesiveness could be enforced by low levels of team proximity.

The decrease in interaction between group members may, as suggested by this research, also lead to a decrease in intra-team coordination. Langfred (2000: 569) states: “as individual work becomes more independent, and as individuals exert more control over the scheduling and implementation of their own tasks, there will be less interaction between group members”. This is also true for the teams that participated in this research. As the team members experience less interaction with other team members, teams may tend to be less able to coordinate their activities. Langfred (2005) suggests that this depends on the level of task interdependence between team members. Later in this section will be discussed to what extent the team members at NIM are task interdependent and what could be the implications of this interdependence for the functioning of team autonomy.

### **6.1.3 Team autonomy and team effectiveness**

Concerning the relation between team autonomy and team effectiveness, Stewart (2006) carefully states that team autonomy may be beneficial for teams, but he puts emphasis on the fact that more research is needed to understand the environmental conditions that influence the extent to which autonomy improves performance. Previous research showed that the question whether team autonomy results in higher levels of team effectiveness depends on how team effectiveness is defined and what

measure is used. With respect to the performance outcomes of self-managing work teams, for example, the majority of the existing research found a positive effect between self-managing work teams and performance, albeit that the effect is frequently just modestly (Beekun, 1989). There are also studies that found no effect (Wall et al. 1986) or suggest that there is a negative effect between self-managing work teams and performance (Chaston, 1998). Concerning the attitudinal outcomes of team autonomy, Cohen & Ledford (1994) found an increase in job satisfaction as a result of team autonomy. Finally, regarding behavioural outcomes, the findings of Wall et al. (1986), Cordery et al. (1991) and Cohen & Ledford (1994) showed that team autonomy results in higher rates of absenteeism and turnover. The different results mentioned above indicate that previous research showed that whether team autonomy results in high levels of team effectiveness, highly depends on which definition and operationalization of team effectiveness is used.

Langfred (2000) found that team autonomy could cause an increase in group cohesiveness as “group autonomy will be perceived as a signal of management's faith and endorsement of the group, increasing the status relative to groups with less or no autonomy. Greater group autonomy is expected to lead to status, and hence increased membership desirability in a group” (p. 568). This research found no evidence for an increase in group cohesiveness as a result of team autonomy. This research even found little evidence that contradicts the statement mentioned as team members suggested that they sometimes perceive team autonomy as an excuse for delegating more tasks to the teams. An explanation for this contradictory finding could be that the management has not adequately communicated about the motivation behind granting more autonomy to the teams. Another explanation for not finding a positive relation between team autonomy and group cohesiveness could be that the fragmentation effect, enforced by high levels of team proximity, overrules the possibility for group cohesiveness to increase or develop.

This study suggests that team members could benefit from team autonomy as they indicate they experience job satisfaction as a result of the perceived team autonomy. This is in accordance with the findings of Cohen & Ledford (1994), who state that autonomous teams “report significantly higher levels of job satisfaction, growth satisfaction, social satisfaction, group satisfaction, and perceptions of positive change.

The differences between autonomous teams and traditionally-managed groups are consistent and are statistically significant, although the differences are relatively modest” (p.28-29). However, this study also suggests that team autonomy could cause a decrease in internal work motivation. An explanation could be that team autonomy can be perceived as a message of “figure it out” by management and due to the increased workload they perceive as a result from team autonomy.

Also, the teams indicated that they perceive a higher workload as a result of the high level of team autonomy, because of all the additional tasks accompanied by the perceived team autonomy. Van Mierlo et al. (2001) found that “perceived autonomy in the team task is negatively to individual workload. This is contradicting the findings of this study. This possible increase in perceived workload could be resulting from the amount of time that is assigned to team-related tasks by the organization. The social workers are allowed to spend 35% of their time on non-client related activities such as organizing team meetings and maintaining contact with network partners, forcing them to exert all their team related tasks in a limited amount of time.

#### **6.1.4 Individual autonomy, team autonomy and team effectiveness**

Hackman (1988) states that one of the key characteristics of autonomous teams is the face-to-face interaction between team members. High levels of individual autonomy, however, may often involve a lack of interaction with other team members (Langfred, 2007). This research suggests that this lack of interaction with other team members could lead to less intra-team coordination, resulting in a less effective functioning of team autonomy in terms of coordinating the team activities resulting from this team autonomy.

The results of this study suggest that this possibility of less intra-team coordination occurring, which may negatively influence the relation between team autonomy and team effectiveness, may be enforced by the level of team proximity. Chong (2012: 5) states “people in close proximity tend to experience team awareness, require less effort to initiate conversation, and experience a strong sense of team identification”. This seems exactly true for the teams at NIM and is suggested to be of influence on the tension between individual autonomy and team autonomy. Teams that are

confronted with a low level of team proximity identify themselves more in terms of their individual job and tasks, while teams with a high level of team proximity identify themselves a more in terms of group membership. Group members will need to spend more time interacting and coordinating with other group members on group decision making and planning, and by so doing will incur process loss as they spend less time on individual tasks. Additionally, Langfred (2000) states that this influences the team cohesiveness and therefore the team effectiveness. Langfred (2000), however, also suggested and found that team autonomy increases team cohesiveness. This study did not found an indication for this relation as mentioned earlier. This could be explained by the influence of team proximity as discussed above. If there is not much interaction between individual team members, because the members work individually at different location, it seems hard to not get fragmented.

Langfred (2005) showed in his study that the combined effects of individual and team autonomy on performance are contingent on the level of task interdependence: “Teams characterized by high task interdependence performed better with high levels of team autonomy, but worse with high levels of individual autonomy. In contrast, teams characterized by low task interdependence performed worse with high levels of team autonomy, but better with high levels of individual autonomy” (Langfred, 2005: 523-524). Langfred (2000) is suggesting, that both task interdependence and team autonomy require members to share information. When task interdependence of a team is a vast characteristic of the team, indicating that members already have to share information, it will help them in effectively being autonomous by not having to invest additional time in sharing information needed for being autonomous. This is not the case with the teams that participated in this research. The teams at NIM do not seem highly interdependent with respect to the execution of their tasks. A manager explains that in their everyday practice they do not really need each other; accept for the distribution of clients. There are some team activities that have to be organized and coordinated, but in theory it is possible that one person carries out these tasks without the help of others. It seems theoretically possible to not interact for a certain amount of time without things going wrong.

The teams at NIM, however, do show emotional interdependence, which is the reason they feel the urgency to interact with each other. But this interaction is focused on sharing feelings, rather than sharing information. This ‘emotional’ interdependence

shows how an organizational context may affect the relationships between autonomy and team effectiveness, which Langfred (2000) called for. It is, however, the question whether this type of interdependence functions the same as task interdependence as highly task interdependent teams benefits from less expected process loss while being autonomous as a result of increased interaction. If ‘emotional’ interdependence would benefit from the same consequences of task interdependence, all team members should experience this interdependence, meaning this interdependence is dependent on the personal characteristics of the team members. Task interdependence on the other side, is ‘forcing’ the team members to frequently interact with each other. For ‘emotional’ interdependence, thus, counts that there is a risk of individuals not interacting as a result of not experiencing this ‘emotional’ interdependence, while others do.

Langfred (2000) states that future research should explore for possible other mediating factors between autonomy and effectiveness, such as motivation and satisfaction. This research found that there is an indication for a tension between individual and team autonomy in relation to internal work motivation. Individual autonomy is suggested to increase the team members’ internal work motivation. According to Hackman and Oldham (1976), individual autonomy is one of five job characteristics that determine the motivating potential of a job, leading to the outcomes of increased motivation and work effectiveness. However, for team autonomy this is not always the case as explained earlier. Wall et al. (1986) did not find any effect between team autonomy and motivation: “autonomous workgroups have no clear effect on internal work motivation, organizational commitment, or mental health” (p.294). If there is indeed a tension between the two levels of autonomy in relation to motivation, it could be suggested that it is difficult to incorporate both high levels of individual autonomy and team autonomy in one team while having benefit from both levels of autonomy.

## **6.2 Limitations and directions for future research**

This research has some important limitations, which will be explained in this section. Also, directions for future research are suggested.

The most important limitation of this research is the fact that no relation between the different levels of autonomy and team effectiveness is found. No variation on the independent variables was found. This could be a result of an insufficient amount of respondents. However, this could also be a result of inadequate measurement. In the survey, the same items are used for measuring the two types of autonomy, which may cause confusion among the respondents. In addition, no variation could be found because the teams simply do not vary on the variables used in this research. This could indicate that it is wrongly presumed that the teams could vary on the autonomy scales.

Not only the number of respondents was relatively low, also the number of teams that participated in this research could be argued to be insufficient for collecting and analyzing quantitative data. With respect to the number of respondents, the response rate per team was rather low. Two teams even did not respond to the survey, which resulted in missing data on the autonomy scales from these two teams. Furthermore, as one team is financed differently as compared to the other teams, no data was available regarding team production for this team. The qualitative part of this research, however, suggested that there is an indication that the types of autonomy do relate to team effectiveness and previous research showed as well that there is a relation between the concepts (Langfred, 2000; 2004; 2007), as mentioned earlier.

With respect to the indicators used for measuring team effectiveness, the weighed average production numbers and waiting time seemed not appropriate for finding variation between teams, which makes comparing the teams in terms of team effectiveness in relation to autonomy impossible based on the quantitative data. Regarding the production targets, NIM is provided a budget for the execution of social work in a certain geographical area based on a number of cases. This production budget is provided in advance and NIM makes sure this budget will not be exceeded. Therefore, all teams comply with the production targets and the experience is that the teams never produce fewer cases than agreed on. In addition, the different



teams are working in different geographical areas with different populations. Different populations mean that there are different types of problems that need different approaches. These different populations also means there are (a) different (amount of) network partners. This has implications for comparing the teams in terms of team effectiveness and for developing a universal standard for all teams. This research used weighted averages per FTE per team in order to minimize the implications described above as the size of the team is related to the amount of client applications (i.e. the larger the team, the larger the geographic area or the amount of problems).

A possible solution regarding these implications, according to different respondents, could be that the effectiveness of the different teams would be measured using the annual plans the teams compose. Through using the teams' annual plans, every team can set targets taking into account the conditions of their specific working area. However, the teams should include the same format for their annual plan in order to keep the plans comparable. This is not the case right now.

This research also suggests that stakeholder satisfaction, in addition to performance measures, could be an appropriate outcome measure in this specific organizational context. This, because the organization is highly dependent on the satisfaction of several stakeholders (e.g. financier, clients and network partners) in terms of acquiring budget.

The qualitative part of this study asked the respondents how they would define team effectiveness and subsequently how autonomy would influence these aspects of team effectiveness. However, exploring for alternative definitions could create inconsistencies in measurement as different teams may provide different indicators for team effectiveness. Therefore, the respondents were asked how the concepts of autonomy affect them as a team in terms of effectiveness after exploring the concept of effectiveness. Team members, sometimes, seemed uncritical about their own performance. As a result, a more favorable image than reality permits is possibly shaped in the data. Besides presenting a more positive image, team members might be afraid talking openly in the presence of other team members. Integrating individual interviews in the research design should control for these possible biases. Still, no clear variation can be identified and questions can be raised whether the relations are approached adequately. The reason this research did not use an existing



conceptualization like the one from Cohen and Ledfort (1994) is because of size of the organization. NIM is a rather small organization, with a relatively small amount of teams. Finding statistical variation using a questionnaire is almost impossible and measuring the range of indicators as proposed by Cohen and Ledfort (1994) for example would be very difficult from a practical as well as a methodological perspective. Future research should focus on developing an adequate measure for team effectiveness for studies with a restricted number of teams.

With respect to the validity of multiple case studies, a central concern is external validity. A multiple case study design has all of the advantages of a single case design in capturing real-world contexts, but in repeating the procedures on multiple cases, this replication enhances the validity and generalizability of the findings (Galloway & Sheridan, 1993). Of importance, here, is the fact that social work is a relatively specific organizational context. A concept like ‘emotional’ interdependence is not likely to be relevant in other organizational contexts. This also counts for ‘team proximity’; it is not usual to be geographically fragmented to such an extent as in this specific context. Also, as mentioned earlier, this study used similar items in the survey to measure individual and team autonomy, which might result in poor discriminant validity.

In general, all the proposed mechanisms suggested by this research need statistical validation that could be provided by future research. As discussed in the previous chapter, this research suggests that not only interdependence is a contingent factor influencing the effectiveness of team autonomy, but also team proximity, enforcing the possible negative consequences of individual autonomy (i.e. intra-team coordination and cohesiveness), could indirectly influence the effectiveness of team autonomy when individual autonomy is high. Future research should empirically test this suggestion. In addition, other than task interdependence, there is an indication that social workers are to some extent emotionally interdependent. Future research could focus on the influence of emotional interdependence on individual and team autonomy in order to find whether this concept functions as task interdependence in the relation between autonomy and team effectiveness. Finally, this research found that there may be an indication for internal work motivation to create a tension between individual and team autonomy in relation to team effectiveness. Team autonomy may not result in higher motivation as a result of a possible increase

in workload and unclear instructions by management, while individual autonomy seems to motivate individual team members. This may cause a tension in teams with high levels of team autonomy and high levels of individual autonomy. Future research, as already suggested by Langfred (2000), should empirically test whether this tension exists.

### **6.3 Practical recommendations**

Based on the results, conclusion and discussion of this research, several practical recommendations can be made regarding the relation between individual autonomy, team autonomy and team effectiveness. This chapter is focused on NIM's ambition to make the teams of social workers increasingly autonomous.

Primarily, it is of great importance to develop a solid assessment system with clear indicators for the concept of team effectiveness. Before paying attention on how various variables have an impact on the effectiveness on the team level, there should be a shared understanding about the definition and operationalization of team effectiveness. The results of this research show that the production per FTE per team and the average waiting time per team are insufficient for measuring and comparing team level output. Based on the suggestions of the respondents that participated in this research, a measure could be developed including 'stakeholder satisfaction' next to the already implemented production output and average waiting time. Stakeholder satisfaction could include indicators like 'client satisfaction', 'customer satisfaction' and 'network partner satisfaction'. This could be measured using annual questionnaires for network partners and customers, and using short questionnaires after every treatment program for clients. Next to the output measures, this research showed several critical success factors for team effectiveness. Concepts such as 'network position', 'adaptive capacity' and 'emotional well-being' are suggested as relevant success factors for team effectiveness. Although these factors are rather complex and difficult to measure, it is worthwhile to pay attention to these concepts as they are opted by the teams as important with respect to the effective functioning of a team. Several respondents, as discussed in the previous chapter, suggested that the teams' annual plans could be used as assessment tools for measuring team effectiveness. Important, here, is that the teams use the same format in order to make the different annual plans comparable.

As this research suggests that due to the high levels of individual autonomy the teams could get fragmented, one could raise the question: to what extent are the teams at NIM actually teams? A team, according to Cohen & Bailey (1997:241), is defined as “a collection of individuals who are *interdependent in their tasks*, who *share responsibility for outcomes*, who see themselves and who are seen by others as *an intact social entity* embedded in one or more larger social systems, and who manage their relationships across organizational boundaries”. First, As been stated, there is no indication that the individual team members are *task interdependent*. Second, it could be discussed whether the team members *share responsibility for outcomes* as the total production target is the sum of the individual production targets. In addition, as a result of the high levels of individual autonomy some teams feel to such an extent fragmented that it is the question whether all team members see themselves as *an intact social entity*. The social workers are individually autonomous to such an extent that there is possibility that they could operate as individual professionals in a network of other social professionals as well. The answer to the question whether the teams at NIM should be organized as teams or that NIM should be a facilitating organization for a large network of social workers (or other social professionals) also impacts the decision regarding the autonomy-question. Creating an organization without a team structure could benefit from the already existing individual autonomy by making use of the professional, independent, flexible attitude of the social workers. However, such a structure should be facilitating the need for emotional support from other social workers in the network in order to prevent possible a possible decrease in emotional well-being that could result in the less effective functioning of the social workers.

As Langfred (2000: 581) states: “if an organization using work groups or teams believes in ‘empowering’ its employees by granting them more autonomy, or letting teams be more self-managing, for example, great care must be taken in the implementation”. This research showed that implementing high levels of team autonomy in teams that experience high levels of team proximity could lead to ineffective functioning of team autonomy. In addition, autonomy at the team level may conflict with autonomy at the individual level as a countervailing influence may

produced with respect to the internal work motivation of team members, which could subsequently lead to a decrease in team effectiveness.

In addition, choosing for a structure of self-managing teams requires a clear definition of *what* the teams should ‘produce’ or ‘achieve’ collectively as mentioned earlier and attention should be paid on making the individual team members increasingly task interdependent as suggested by Langfred (2004). This could cause teams to interact more frequently, which may increase the intra-team coordination that is needed for the adequate exertion of team tasks. As suggested in this research, the teams indicate that they need a shared location in order to coordinate their activities and being able to emotionally support their team colleagues. And finally, the organizational boundaries need to be redefined in order to comply to the structure of self-managing teams. A predetermination of how social workers spend their time seems paradoxical and is not in line with the ambition to make the teams increasingly autonomous.

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## 8. Appendices

### 8.1 Survey

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Beste NIM'er,

Zoals je wellicht weet ben ik sinds februari 2013 werkzaam als Junior Trainee vanuit de opleiding Organisatiewetenschappen aan de Universiteit van Tilburg. In het kader van mijn afstudeeronderzoek naar het gelijke effect van individuele- en groepsautonomie op de effectiviteit van teams vraag ik je medewerking voor het invullen van deze vragenlijst. Deze vragenlijst is uitgezet onder een aantal teams van maatschappelijk werkers binnen NIM.

Het invullen van de vragenlijst zal ongeveer 7 minuten van je tijd in beslag nemen. De vragen kun je beantwoorden door een antwoord aan de kruisen. Kruis slechts één antwoord aan. Probeer bij twijfel toch te kiezen voor de mogelijkheid die het dichtst bij de werkelijkheid komt.

De beantwoording van de vragenlijst is anoniem. De resultaten zullen op teamniveau worden geanalyseerd en gerapporteerd. Om een zo goed mogelijk beeld te kunnen schetsen van de teams, streef ik naar zoveel mogelijk deelnemers.

Alvast hartelijk dank voor het invullen van de vragenlijst!

#### Onderdeel 1. Algemene vragen

*Het eerste deel van de vragenlijst betreft enkele algemene gegevens.*

1	Wat is je leeftijd?	.... jaar
2	Wat is je geslacht?	Man Vrouw
3	Binnen welk team ben je op dit moment werkzaam?	X
4	In welke categorie valt je functie?	Stagiair(e) Maatschappelijk werker

		Maatschappelijk werker 2+
5	Hoe lang ben je werkzaam bij NIM? (naar schatting)	... jaar en .... maanden
6	Hoe lang ben je werkzaam binnen je huidige team? (naar schatting)	... jaar en .... maanden

### Onderdeel 2. Individuele autonomie

De volgende vragen gaan over individuele autonomie. In hoeverre zijn de volgende uitspraken op **jou als individu** van toepassing?

		1. Helemaal mee oneens	2	3	4	5	6	7. Helemaal mee eens
1	Ik ben vrij om te beslissen hoe mijn werk uitgevoerd moet worden.							
2	Ik ben vrij om te bepalen welke methode ik gebruik bij het uitvoeren van mijn werk.							
3	Ik ben in staat om zelf te bepalen hoe ik te werk zal gaan.							
4	Ik kan bepalen wanneer bepaalde activiteiten worden uitgevoerd.							
5	Ik heb controle over het inroosteren van mijn werk.							
6	Ik heb controle over de volgorde van mijn activiteiten binnen het team.							
7	Ik kan zelf bepalen wat mijn doelen zijn.							
8	Ik heb controle over wat ik zou moeten bereiken binnen het team.							

### Onderdeel 3. Team autonomie

De volgende vragen gaan over de autonomie die je op teamniveau ervaart. In hoeverre zijn de volgende uitspraken op **jouw team** van toepassing?

		1. Helemaal mee oneens	2	3	4	5	6	7. Helemaal mee eens
1	Ons team is vrij om te beslissen hoe het werk uitgevoerd moet worden.							
2	Het team is vrij om te bepalen welke methode wordt gebruikt bij het uitvoeren van het werk.							
3	Het team kan zelf bepalen hoe ze te werk zal gaan.							
4	Het team kan bepalen wanneer bepaalde activiteiten worden uitgevoerd.							
5	Het team heeft controle over het inroosteren van het werk.							
6	Het team heeft controle over							

	de volgorde van de teamactiviteiten.							
7	Het team is in staat om de teamdoelen vast te stellen.							
8	Het team heeft controle over wat het zou moeten bereiken.							

**Dit is het einde van de vragenlijst.**

**Hartelijk dank voor je medewerking!**

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## **8.2 Topic list semi-structured interviews: (senior) social workers**

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### **Introductie**

- Voorstellen en uitleg onderzoek
- Doel van interview: de relaties tussen individuele autonomie, team autonomie en team effectiviteit onderzoeken.
- Uitleg interviewsituatie (anonimiteit, opname)

### **Team effectiviteit**

- Definitie: wat versta je onder team effectiviteit?
- Wanneer is een team van maatschappelijk werkers effectief (dossiers, cliënten, interne processen)? Waarom?
- Hoe kijkt jouw leidinggevende hier naar? Hoe zou je dit verklaren?
- En de financier?
- Wat ondernemen jullie als team om de effectiviteit van het team zo hoog mogelijk te maken?

### **Individuele autonomie**

- Definitie: wat versta je onder individuele autonomie?
- Komen de resultaten van de vragenlijst overeen met jouw beeld van de individuele autonomie binnen jouw team?

- Waarom wel/niet?
- In hoeverre vind je dat maatschappelijk werkers bij NIM individueel autonoom zijn?
  - Waarom?
- Op welke concrete manier(en) uit de individuele autonomie die je ervaart zich?
- Kun je de grenzen van de individuele autonomie omschrijven?
  - Hoe ver reikt de individuele autonomie en waar stopt het? Voorbeelden.
  - Waarom?

### **Team autonomie**

- Definitie: wat versta je onder teamautonomie?
- Komen de resultaten van de vragenlijst overeen met jouw beeld van de teamautonomie binnen jouw team?
  - Waarom wel/niet?
- In hoeverre vind je dat de teams van maatschappelijk werkers bij NIM als team autonoom zijn?
  - Waarom?
- Op welke concrete manier(en) uit de team autonomie die je ervaart zich?
- Kun je de grenzen van de teamautonomie omschrijven?
  - Hoe ver reikt de autonomie van je team en waar stopt het? Voorbeelden.
  - Waarom?

### **Individuele autonomie en team effectiviteit**

- Wat zijn voor jou de voordelen van de individuele autonomie die je ervaart? (zowel op teamniveau als individueel niveau). Voorbeelden.
- Wat zijn de nadelen? (zowel op teamniveau als individueel niveau). Voorbeelden.
- Op welke manier beïnvloedt de mate van individuele autonomie die je ervaart de effectiviteit van je team als geheel? Voorbeelden.
- Wat gebeurt er met de effectiviteit van het team wanneer de organisatie jouw individuele autonomie zou vergroten? En wat als ze deze zouden inperken? Waarom?
- Wat zijn in jouw ogen factoren die van invloed kunnen zijn op de relatie tussen individuele autonomie en de effectiviteit van het team als geheel?

### **Team autonomie en team effectiviteit**

- Wat zijn voor jou de voordelen van de team autonomie die je ervaart? (zowel op teamniveau als individueel niveau). Voorbeelden.
- Wat zijn de nadelen? (zowel op teamniveau als individueel niveau). Voorbeelden.
- Op welke manier beïnvloedt de mate van team autonomie die je ervaart de effectiviteit van je team als geheel?. Voorbeelden.
- Wat gebeurt er met de effectiviteit van het team wanneer de organisatie de autonomie van het team zou vergroten? En wat als ze deze zouden inperken? Waarom?
- Wat zijn in jouw ogen factoren die van invloed kunnen zijn op de relatie tussen team autonomie en de effectiviteit van het team als geheel?

### **Team autonomie, individuele autonomie en team effectiviteit**

- In hoeverre, en op welke manier, ervaar je een spanning tussen de mate van individuele- en team autonomie in relatie tot de effectiviteit van je team?
- Op welke manier werken de twee vormen van autonomie op elkaar in? Positief? Negatief?
- Wat zijn de factoren die zorgen voor de spanning tussen jouw autonomie als individu en de vrijheid die jullie als team ervaren?
  - Wat heeft dit voor gevolgen voor de effectiviteit van het team?

### **Afsluiting**

- Eventuele vragen en opmerkingen
- Terugkoppeling
- Afronding en bedanken

## 8.3 Topic list semi-structured interviews: managers

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### Introductie

- Voorstellen en uitleg onderzoek
- Doel van interview: de relaties tussen individuele autonomie, team autonomie en team effectiviteit onderzoeken.
- Uitleg interviewsituatie (anonimiteit, opname)

### Team effectiviteit

- Definitie: wat versta je onder team effectiviteit?
- Wanneer is een team van maatschappelijk werkers effectief (dossiers, cliënten, interne processen)? Waarom?
- Wat is over het algemeen de visie van de organisatie op team effectiviteit?
  - Hoe wordt het gemeten? Waarom?
- Hoe kijk je als leidinggevende hiernaar? Waarom?
- En de financier?
- In hoeverre merk je verschillen in team effectiviteit tussen de verschillende teams? Waaraan ligt dat?

### Individuele autonomie

- Definitie: wat versta je onder individuele autonomie?
- Komen de resultaten van de vragenlijst overeen met jouw beeld van de individuele autonomie binnen de teams?
  - Waarom wel/niet?
- In hoeverre zijn de individuele maatschappelijk werkers autonoom in het uitvoeren van hun taken?
- Wat is de visie van de organisatie op het geven van autonomie aan individuele maatschappelijk werkers?
- Waaraan merk je dat de maatschappelijk werkers bij NIM individueel autonoom zijn?
- Kun je de grenzen van de individuele autonomie omschrijven?
  - Hoe ver reikt de individuele autonomie en waar stopt het? Voorbeelden.
  - Waarom?

## **Team autonomie**

- Definitie: wat versta je onder teamautonomie?
- Komen de resultaten van de vragenlijst overeen met jouw beeld van de teamautonomie binnen de teams?
  - Waarom wel/niet?
- In hoeverre zijn de teams bij NIM autonoom in het uitvoeren van hun taken?
- Wat is de visie van de organisatie op het geven van autonomie aan de teams van maatschappelijk werkers?
- Waaraan merk je dat de teams bij NIM autonoom zijn?
- Kun je de grenzen van de teamautonomie omschrijven?
  - Hoe ver reikt de autonomie van je team en waar stopt het? Voorbeelden.
  - Waarom?

## **Individuele autonomie en team effectiviteit**

- Wat zijn volgens jou de voordelen van het geven van individuele autonomie aan maatschappelijk werkers?
  - Wat zijn de voordelen op teamniveau?
- Wat zijn de nadelen? (zowel op individueel- als teamniveau)
- Op welke manier beïnvloedt de mate van individuele autonomie die er wordt gegeven de effectiviteit van de teams als geheel?
  - In hoeverre merk je verschillen tussen teams? Hoe komt dat?
- Wat gebeurt er met de effectiviteit van de teams wanneer de organisatie de individuele autonomie zou vergroten? En wat als ze deze zouden inperken? Waarom?
- Wat zijn in jouw ogen factoren die van invloed kunnen zijn op de relatie tussen individuele autonomie en de effectiviteit van de teams als geheel?

## **Team autonomie en team effectiviteit**

- Wat zijn voor jou de voordelen van het geven van autonomie aan teams (zowel op teamniveau als individueel niveau)?
- Wat zijn de nadelen (zowel op teamniveau als individueel niveau)?
- Op welke manier beïnvloedt de mate van team autonomie de effectiviteit van de teams als geheel?
  - In hoeverre merk je verschillen tussen teams? Hoe komt dat?



- Wat gebeurt er met de effectiviteit van de teams wanneer de organisatie de autonomie van het team zou vergroten? En wat als ze deze zouden inperken? Waarom?
- Wat zijn in jouw ogen factoren die van invloed kunnen zijn op de relatie tussen Team autonomie en de effectiviteit van de teams als geheel?

### **Team autonomie, individuele autonomie en team effectiviteit**

- In hoeverre, en op welke manier, merk je aan de teams dat ze een spanning ervaren tussen het niveau van individuele autonomie en het niveau van team autonomie die ze ervaren?
- Op welke manier werken de twee vormen van autonomie op elkaar in? Positief? Negatief?
- Wat zijn mogelijke factoren die zorgen voor de spanning tussen individuele autonomie en team autonomie?
  - Wat heeft dit voor gevolgen voor de effectiviteit van het team?

### **Afsluiting**

- Eventuele vragen en opmerkingen
- Terugkoppeling
- Afronding en bedanken

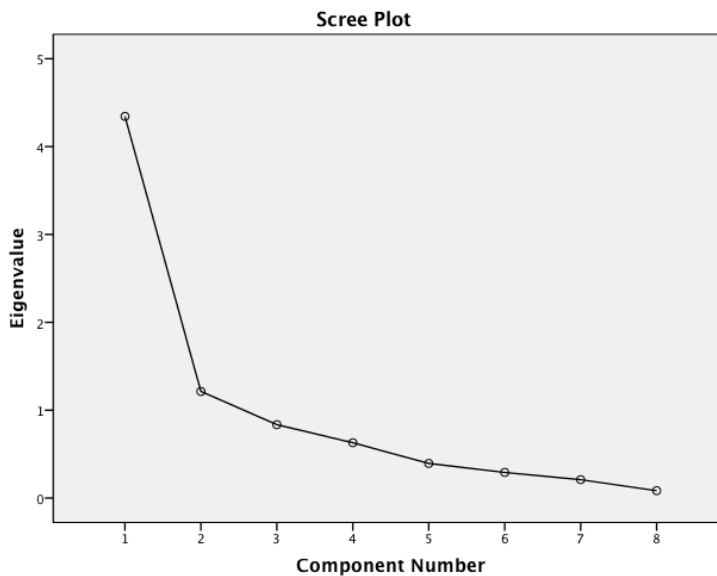
## 8.4 SPSS output

### 8.4.1 Individual autonomy

*Confirmatory Factor analysis*

#### KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	,776
Approx. Chi-Square	148,038
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity df	28
Sig.	,000



#### Rotated Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>

	Component	
	1	2
IA3	,831	
IA2	,759	
IA7	,737	
IA8	,689	
IA6		,935
IA5		,914
IA4		,688
IA1	,528	,587

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

Reliability analysis

**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,869	8

**Item-Total Statistics**

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
IA1	40,7879	24,797	,703	,843
IA2	40,4848	25,383	,521	,868
IA3	40,1515	25,570	,768	,838
IA4	40,5152	26,695	,679	,848
IA5	40,2121	25,235	,771	,837
IA6	40,3939	24,996	,570	,861
IA7	40,3636	27,676	,569	,858
IA8	40,5758	27,814	,503	,864

**8.4.2 Team autonomy**

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

**Correlation Matrix**

	GA1	GA2	GA3	GA4	GA5	GA6	GA7	GA8
GA1	1,000	,606	,510	,554	,323	,273	,220	,434
GA2	,606	1,000	<b>,943</b>	,409	,376	,288	,447	,474
GA3	,510	<b>,943</b>	1,000	,370	,418	,269	,521	,487
GA4	,554	,409	,370	1,000	,731	,753	,384	,384
GA5	,323	,376	,418	,731	1,000	,814	,605	,586
GA6	,273	,288	,269	,753	,814	1,000	,532	,526
GA7	,220	,447	,521	,384	,605	,532	1,000	<b>,910</b>
GA8	,434	,474	,487	,384	,586	,526	<b>,910</b>	1,000

Reliability analysis

**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,890	8

**Item-Total Statistics**

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
GA1	38,0000	38,813	,533	,887
GA2	37,8182	37,591	,672	,876
GA3	37,8788	34,922	,643	,879
GA4	38,1212	35,610	,662	,876
GA5	37,7879	35,922	,743	,869
GA6	37,9394	36,059	,651	,877
GA7	37,4242	34,502	,699	,872
GA8	37,7273	33,955	,730	,869

**8.4.3 ANOVA**

*Individual autonomy*

**Test of Homogeneity of Variances**

Average individual autonomy

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
,336	9	22	,953

**ANOVA**

Average individual autonomy

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3,755	9	,417	1,211	,338
Within Groups	7,581	21	,345		
Total	11,335	30			

Team autonomy

**Test of Homogeneity of Variances**

Average team autonomy

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1,915	9	21	,103

**ANOVA**

Average team autonomy

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7,103	9	,789	1,130	,384
Within Groups	15,364	21	,698		
Total	22,467	30			

## **8.5 Audio files**