



# The Magic of Self-Directed Work Teams: A Case Study in Courage and Culture Change

*Paul C. Palmes*

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Northern Pipe Products is today experiencing unprecedented efficiencies, employee involvement, a vibrant and desired training program, record output per-man hour, and lowest overall waste in company history. What it did and learned over the past five years is the story of this book.

The science of Self-Directed Work Teams resides in the realization that chance and stewardship are different sides of the same coin. Admitting to the obvious truth of infinite human variation dismantles the notion of truly controlling people. If not in their actions, surely in their minds and reflected in their attitudes people resent being told what to do. They much prefer to be told why something must be done and then allowed to apply their unique talents and strengths to manage the assignment. Leaders who understand and therefore respect individual differences use diversity to create value, allowing the insights of others to create often-superior approaches.

This story could have taken place in a hospital, school, supermarket, or any other organization that requires people to work together for the greater good. Regardless of the setting, be it computer service, healthcare, education, manufacturing or child care, what follows could just as well be your story. Because it's about people and their unlimited potential to achieve extraordinary things, the manufacture of pipe is simply a metaphor. Any group of people facing another day just like yesterday can choose to follow this path, regardless of the style or color of shoes they wear. True opportunity is "one size fits all."

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