

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**The Eye of the Team : Critical incidents analysis of  
Team metaphors used by teams in a health setting**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts in Psychology  
at Massey University, Albany  
Auckland, New Zealand**

**Vinodhini Ramkissoon**

**2005**

## **Abstract**

This study sought to explore working teams' mental models of their success and failure, to cast light on what improves rather than undermines the teams' performance. Implicit team mental models may become explicit through exploring the language, specifically metaphors, that teams use to describe successful and unsuccessful performance. Ten teams comprising 69 individuals from a large district health board and including one all Māori team, participated in semi-structured interviews, that focused on the positive and negative critical incidents, when working together. Twin Content analyses of each type of incident revealed classical attribution biases, for example self-serving biases (team failures externalised using system metaphors as in "It is not our fault, it is the computer's fault" and successes internalised as in "the high standard of work is a reflection on the integrity and skills of the team"). At the same time however teams occasionally sidestepped these biases by reflecting on whether they could have achieved even more. Unlike their counterparts, the single all-Māori team used the same "two worlds" metaphor to describe both success and failure through bi-cultural harmony and bi-cultural conflict. Discussion focuses on how metaphors enhance team development. For example through discourse analysis of training sessions, teams may become aware of what biases the team is engaging in, thereby fuelling organisational learning.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to the following:

Associate Professor Stuart Carr for your guidance.

Ailse Toye, Te Ariki Morehu and Heeni Hohepa for your assistance.

The participating organisation and the respondents for taking part in this study.

My colleagues (friends) at work, and to Peter for all your support during a difficult year.

I would like to thank the people who have helped me on this journey

To my friends and family for all your support and kind words.

To the creator for always showing me a guiding star and lighting my path with hope.

To Ann Rundle, who, when storms hit, provided a port of support, shelter and wisdom.

And to the most important person in my life...Sean, I would never have made it without you. You are my anchor that keeps me steady, my lifejacket when I am in trouble and a tug boat that carries me through to the end. May all our future travels be spent travelling together... on a boat that goes out fishing.

## Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Table of Contents	ii
List of tables	vii
List of Appendices	viii
Introduction	1
Team Mental Models .....	1
Dramaturgical Metaphor of Team Mental Model .....	2
Research Strand 1: Factors Discriminating High from Low Performance .....	4
Research Strand 2: Self report on Critical Incidents .....	4
The Nature of Team Mental Models .....	5
Metaphor .....	7
Organisations and Individual Mental Models .....	8
Metaphor and Team Mental Models .....	10
Metaphor and Change Initiatives .....	13
Metaphor and Culture in Organisations .....	15
Metaphors in Health Organisations.....	16
Critical Incidents Technique .....	19
Critical Incidents Technique as used in Motivation Studies .....	19
Attribution Theory .....	22
Expectations of Findings.....	23
Attribution Theory and Associated Expectations .....	23
Group Attribution Theory and Associated Expectations .....	24

Motivational Theory and Associated Expectations.....	26
Cultural and Contextual Differences and Associated Expectations.....	26
Tall Poppy Syndrome.....	27
Summary of Aims of the Present Study .....	28
Method .....	29
Participants.....	29
Participating Organisation.....	29
Respondents .....	29
Occupations.....	31
Indigenous Makeup of Sample.....	31
Sample Design .....	31
Materials.....	32
An Interview Schedule .....	33
Procedure.....	41
Securing Organisational Participation and Consent.....	41
Māori Raters/Advisors .....	42
Ethics Application.....	42
Pilot Study .....	43
Recruitment of Participants.....	43
Arrangements for Team Interviews .....	44
The Team Interviews.....	44
Transcription of Tapes .....	46
Analysis.....	46
Method of Data Analysis .....	46
Process of Analysis: non-Māori team .....	48

Process of Analysis: All-Māori Team.....	51
Results.....	53
Inter-rater reliability.....	53
Metaphors for Successful Versus Unsuccessful Team Performance.....	54
Similar Metaphors.....	56
Travel Metaphor.....	56
Identity Metaphor.....	56
Emotion Metaphor.....	58
Affiliation Metaphor.....	58
Health Metaphor.....	60
Description Metaphor (Circles).....	60
Machine Metaphor.....	61
Commerce Metaphor.....	61
Description Metaphors (Mathematics, Sport and Nature).....	62
Antonymic Metaphors.....	63
Support Metaphor Versus Conflict Metaphors.....	63
Bonding Metaphor Versus Division Metaphor.....	64
Order Metaphor versus Disorder Metaphor.....	66
Building Metaphor Versus Constraint Metaphor.....	66
Harmony Metaphor versus Imbalance Metaphor.....	67
Non-aligned Metaphors: Metaphors Only Present In Successful Team Situations ...	68
Recognition Metaphor.....	68
Social Metaphor.....	68
Non-aligned Metaphors: Metaphors Only Present In Unsuccessful Team Situations	69
Strain Metaphor.....	69

Systems Metaphor .....	70
Waste Metaphor .....	70
Description Metaphor - Personification .....	70
Description (Change Metaphor, Senses Metaphor, and Shapes Metaphor).....	71
Māori Team Metaphors and the Non-Māori Team Metaphors .....	72
Comparison of Māori Metaphors and the non-Māori Metaphors for successful team situations .....	75
Comparison of Māori Metaphors and the Non- Māori Metaphors for Unsuccessful Team Situations.....	78
Expectations .....	80
Expectation 1: Attribution biases versus Team think perspective .....	81
Attribution biases and group effacement bias .....	81
Group Attribution Theory .....	83
Team Think .....	84
Expectation 2: Motivation theory.....	85
Expectation 3 Occupation Differences.....	86
Expectation 4: Tall poppy syndrome .....	88
Discussion .....	90
Key Findings .....	90
Metaphors as a Window to Team Mental Models .....	90
Metaphors Across Performance Levels .....	91
Occupational differences.....	92
Bi-cultural Analysis .....	92
Attribution versus Team Think .....	93
Findings and link with theory .....	95



Team Mental Models .....	95
Research on Metaphor and Team Mental Models .....	95
Metaphor and Culture .....	97
Metaphor and Health Teams .....	97
Health Context and Metaphors.....	98
Tall Poppy Syndrome.....	99
Critical incidents .....	100
Motivational Theory.....	100
Unexpected Findings.....	101
Emotion in teams .....	101
Identity .....	102
The Individual or the Group?.....	103
Limitations .....	103
Implications of the Research.....	104
Conclusion	105
References	107
Appendices	118

## List of tables

Table 1 Profile of respondents by service area, gender and <n>per team .....	30
Table 2 Interview questions and reason/s for inclusion and/or phrasing of questions ..	35
Table 3: Metaphors for team success and failures: Similar, Antonymic, and non-aligned metaphors .....	55
Table 4: List of Maori team metaphors for successful and unsuccessful situations .....	73
Table 5: Comparison of Maori metaphors and non-Maori metaphors for successful team situations .....	74
Table 6: Comparison of Maori and non-Maori metaphors for unsuccessful team situations .....	78

## **List of Appendices**

Appendix A. - Information Sheet .....	118
Appendix B - Consent Form .....	120
Appendix C - Confidentiality Agreement .....	122
Appendix D -Memorandum Of Understanding .....	123
Appendix E – Advertisement .....	124
Appendix F- Confusion matrices and Calculations of Kappas .....	125