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**Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to investigate the organization of research in high-performing research groups in an age of increasing competition and pressure from outside and within higher-education institutions. To explore how researchers navigate such pressures and demands, the practice and perceptions of four high-performing research groups in Denmark and the Netherlands are examined, and the extent to which these groups can be understood as “communities of practice” or if they are displaying “team”-like characteristics is discussed. Previous studies have shown the benefits of communities of practice for organizational performance, and the present study demonstrates that the successful groups do indeed share many characteristics with such communities. A central argument of the paper is, however, also that incentive structures, inherent in many new policy initiatives that are meant to foster excellence in science, are more directed at “team-like” organization by focusing on, e.g., formally organized work processes, predefined goals, milestones, work packages, and

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hierarchically organized consortia. The potential implications of this are discussed. (HRK / Abstract  
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