



Team dynamics and decision making in Nordic skating teams

Some advices from the HLSK leader training committee

Different kinds of Nordic skating groups

- HLSK clubtour group
 - All HLSK Safety Regulations (www.hlsk.nl) apply
 - At least 3 and at most 8 people, of whom at least 2 leaders or 1 leader and 1 leader in training
 - Leaders decide after hearing the others
- Any other (HLSK) Nordic skating group
 - No regulations apply

Become a Nordic Skating team before you go

- Find skaters you know well already and preferably have skated with
- Try to have a mix of competences in the team: ice foxes, experienced Nordic skaters, skaters with lodging and catering competences, skaters with management/leader competences
- Think twice before taking a first timer in the team
- Adapt the HLSK clubtour safety regulations as much as possible
 - at least 3 and at most 8 people in the group
 - make clear agreements in advance about decision making, tasks and responsibilities on and off the ice
 - do safety exercises before and during the trip
- Organize at least one outdoor activity in NL where the team can test and evaluate itself (cycling tour, hiking tour, ...) before you go skating

Five pitfalls for a team



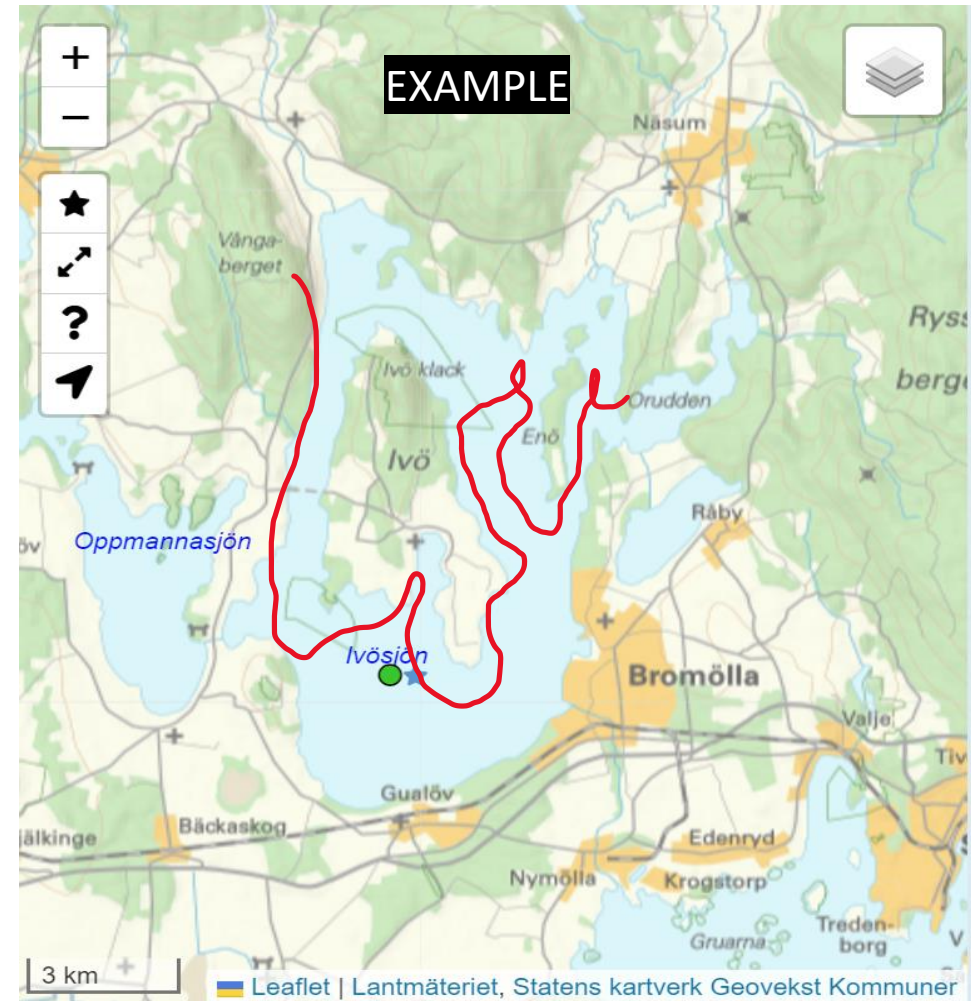
Harestu Vattnet, soon after the plurning Robs is laughing again , 2016-11-14 14:07 Foto: Carolien van Rees

Pitfall 1: The group becomes invulnerable: "groupthink"

Groupthink is present if:

- team members become completely absorbed in the group
- the pursuit of unanimity outweighs the desire to reach a realistic assessment of alternatives.

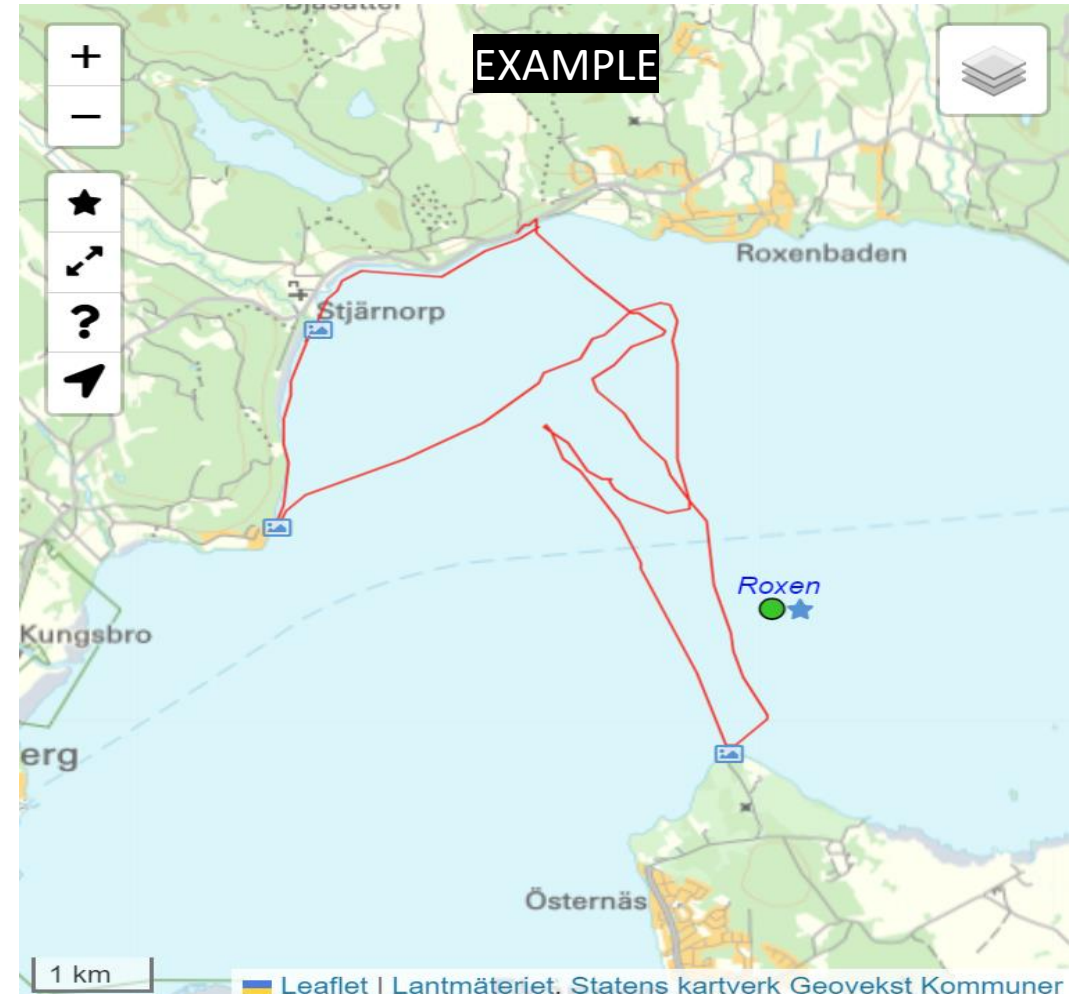
As a result, critical ability deteriorates.



Group thought to skate around Ivö. Nobody questioned the plan. Thin ice after $\frac{3}{4}$ of the lake. Ended up in the dark. Plurrrning in the dark. Stepped on land. Had to walk back to the car for two hours..

Pitfall 2: Polarisation of decision-making: "risky shift"

A decision or judgement becomes more conservative or risky in the group, but in any case more extreme. What you would never (dare to) do on your own suddenly becomes acceptable or possible in the group. Then there is 'risky shift'.



Group skating from Stjärnorps east. The frontman decides to cross the lake. On their way south, the ice show signs of breaking up. Some people doubt but say nothing. On the crossing back, situation gets worse. Open water and råkar. Group later describes tour as risky...

Pitfall 3: Shared responsibility becomes no responsibility

One effect of sharing responsibility can be that, in the end, no one takes responsibility anymore. Or that nobody feels responsible anymore.

Sunday afternoon after ice congress ended. Group of random people decide to go for afternoon skate on Vänern. Everyone is leader in his/her own club. No talks about decision making are done. Nobody knows who is frontman. At a difficult section, the only local guide skates first and plurrs. Everyone else looks at each other. Who is throwing the line?



EXAMPLE

Pitfall 4: Jointly doing what only one wants

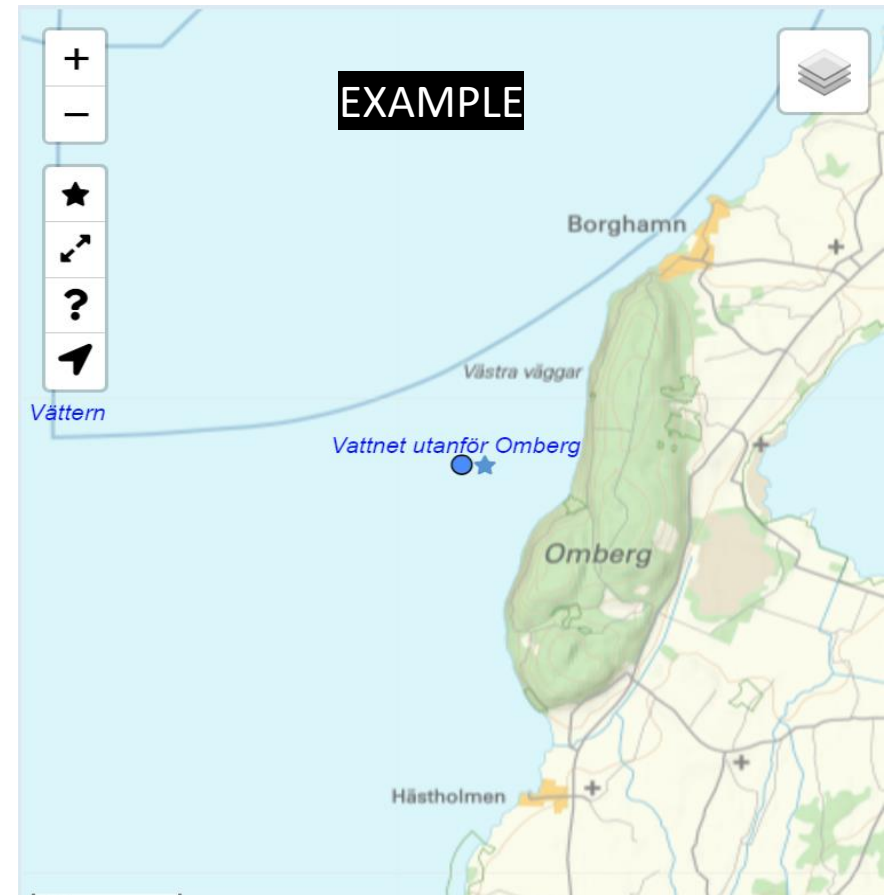
When someone comes up with a proposal and meets little opposition. Not even when the proposal is not supported by the rest of the team. When people are very keen to keep the atmosphere right, a paradoxical situation can arise in groups.



Group arrived in the late afternoon from Arlanda at the cabin. Storsjön down at the hill of the cabin. Leader wants to go out for first skate. Group gets into darkness. Suddenly a råk comes up. Leader plurrs. Group needs to go back. Afterwards, co-leader says she already had doubts.

Pitfall 5: Pressure to belong: conformity

In any team, there will be a certain pressure to conform to group norms. A characteristic of such norms is that they are mostly implicit. Because norms are implicit, the mechanisms to enforce them are also implicit. If great pressure is put on team members to conform to group rules, much talent in the team is lost.



Group skates near Omberg, Vättern. Loud sounds in the ice. Signals of breaking ice. One of the participants feels he doesn't want to continue. Three others want to go on. The experienced leader decides to go back, because of the opinion of one participant, and despite the pressure of the others. Later, the others admit the participant and leader were right to retreat.

The goal: participative leadership

- Sometimes referred to as democratic leadership, participative leadership is a leadership style encouraging leaders to listen to their team members and involve them in (pre-)decision making process. This leadership style requires leaders to be inclusive, utilize good communication skills and crucially, be able to share power/responsibility.
- When a leader adopts a participative style of leadership this encourages collaboration, through accountability. This often leads to a collective effort of a team to identify problems and develop solutions, as opposed to assigning individual blame.
- To have two pairs of eyes with full responsibility, it is wise to assign a second leader. The two leaders together are responsible for the safety of the group. Both leaders have a veto right to control the other leader if there is no consensus.

Examples of critical decisions

- Where are we going to skate?
- Do we take time to do safety exercises?
- Are we making a crossing, to an island or to an opposite bank?
- Are we going to cross this släpråk?
- Unexpected change of circumstances. Change plan?
- Do we take time to do safety exercises during the trip?
- Should we adjust the plan to get back before dark?

→ Time management and time margins are essential for safety



Släpråk (Widening crack)

To pass or not to pass, that's the question. Often the ice on the other side looks tempting.

The right decision depends on more factors than the släpråk itself, so more information gathering and discussion within the group is often necessary.

The decision to stay near land and not to pass a släpråk is always a safe decision.

Tips for optimizing the team and safety on the ice

- Share responsibility for the team process
 - Leave stubbornness at home: when in doubt, don't do it
 - Don't use hidden agendas
 - Watch out for tunnel vision
 - Welcome critical questions
 - Avoid competitive behavior
 - Give and take
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- Don't try to imitate tours from skaters with much more experience
 - Take the time for important decisions
 - A Swedish or other local skater in the team does not guarantee safety
 - Assumption is the mother of all fuck ups.