
Obituary

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Richard DeRidder passed away on the 1st of March 2023. He was a playful and entrepreneurial group researcher. This special issue of Team Performance Management has been compiled as a tribute to his life and work, and celebrates how he inspired his students and colleagues. Richard Theodorus Joseph DeRidder was born on November 16, 1946, in Hooglanderveen, The Netherlands. He studied social psychology at the University of Nijmegen (nowadays the Radboud University), obtaining his *kandidaatsexamen* (cf. BA) in 1969 and his doctoral diploma (cf. MA; cum laude) in 1973, having engaged in research under the supervision of Jos Jaspars. Richard then left for the *Laboratoire de Psychologie Sociale* in Paris, founded by Robert Pagès, first associated with the Sorbonne and later with the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS). There he worked with Jorge DaGloria on human aggression in dyadic interactions (DaGloria and DeRidder, 1977; 1979). For the remainder of his life, he would retain a love for the French language and culture.

Richard accepted a position at Tilburg University in 1973. First, he was employed as a teaching and research assistant, later as an assistant professor and finally as an associate professor. In 1980 he defended his thesis entitled *Agressie in sociale interactie: Waarneming en reactie* [Aggression in social interaction: Perception and reaction] at Tilburg University (DeRidder, 1980), also cum laude. Norm violation remained a key interest ever since, yet now Richard started focusing on its role in the (de)escalation of conflict between social groups in society. In 1993 he established the *Foundation for Intercultural Communication and Conflict Studies* (ICCS), later changed into *Intercultural Conflict, Communication and Negotiation* (ICCN), from where Richard conducted research, engaged in consultancy and organized trainings concerning conflict management and negotiation between professionals with different cultural backgrounds. While continuing and expanding his practice, he left his academic position in 2001.

As his student-assistant I spent many weeks on proof editing the text of his PhD, and coding the lyrics of pop songs (which constituted one of Richard's "wild research" projects). Further, he was my supervisor in my MA-thesis trajectory, where we collaborated on research regarding norm violation and aggression in triads (DeRidder, Schruijer and Rijsman, 1999). Another joint project involved the experience of freedom, designed as a cross-cultural research project, comparing data from Poland and The Netherlands. It was abruptly aborted when I was in Warsaw in 1981 to discuss the pilot data and martial law broke out ... (Schruijer, 2024). Over the years Richard expanded his work on norm violation and small group aggression to the role of norm violations in intergroup relations, engaging in cross-cultural research with India. This project was the context of my PhD (Schruijer, 1990) with Richard being one of my promotors as well as my closest collaborator.

Three phases can be distinguished in Richard's career, each phase having its specific contributions to social psychology in general and groups in particular. During phase one, being a young academic, he was a social psychologist doing fundamental research, in the laboratory, on the determinants of (reactive) aggression in dyads. The findings of his research demonstrate that norm violating behavior that induces an unpleasant experience is labeled as aggressive, and is attributed to malevolent intent. The recipient of this norm violation, in turn, reacts with a norm violation, also causing an unpleasant experience. In triads, a victim who is singled out for attack will react more negatively compared with victims of an undistinctive attack (i.e. when the actor behaves similarly toward the victim and a third person) (DeRidder et al., 1999). In his laboratory work Richard used electric



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shocks and white noise, unpleasant but not harmful, which however would not be approved anymore by current ethical committees ...

In the second phase of his career, Richard was an initiator of a cross-cultural project on intergroup norm violations. This project consisted of researchers in India (Rama Tripathi, Emmanuel Ghosh, Durganand Sinha, Rashmi Kumar (all from Allahabad University) and Jai Sinha (Patna University)), as well as in The Netherlands (Richard DeRidder, Ype Poortinga, Sandra Schruijer). Within the project the so-called Norm Violation Theory (DeRidder, Schruijer and Tripathi, 1992) was developed and tested in both countries, focusing on relations between Hindus and Muslims in India, Turks and Dutch in The Netherlands and, the relations between workers and their supervisors in both countries. Norm Violation Theory studies the role which norm violations and subsequent attributions play in the process of intergroup conflicts, especially in its (de)escalation. Norm violation is considered to be a potent triggering factor of negative intergroup behavior, within an already existing intergroup relationship. Attributions of a norm violation by a group, let's say group A, to internal factors (malevolent intentions or negative dispositions) will result in negative behavior by group B. When the reaction constitutes a norm violation in the eyes of group A, the sequence continues. Norm Violation Theory addresses various factors which influence this elementary sequence, such as ingroup identification, intergroup attitudes, relative power, fraternal relative deprivation and, norms of redress. All empirical studies as well as the theoretical rationale can be found in DeRidder and Tripathi (1992).

Phase three is characterized by applied work for the military, and for various types of professionals, regarding the way they handled conflict in often difficult and multicultural situations. Richard designed training modules and courses for diplomats, immigration officers, polling supervisors, peacekeepers and military observers. He did so for *Clingendael, The Netherlands Institute of International Relations*, that organized a ten-day training, so-called "peace keeping", for military observers who were to be sent out to various conflict areas (e.g. Angola, former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan). Such observers are unarmed, and need to negotiate and mediate to fulfill their task. Richard's modules aimed at developing the intercultural negotiation, mediation and collaboration skills of the observers, using role play and simulations, based on the experiences of former observers. Also, he worked with actors, that took the role of local interpreters. Richard was also actively involved in the design of a multi-party simulation (DeRidder and Callewaert, 1999) and developed an instrument to assess an individual's basic competences for effective collaboration with people from other cultures (Dijk et al., 2010).

Richard thus moved from being an experimental social psychologist, doing laboratory research on interpersonal aggression, to studying intergroup relations in a social, political and historical context, mostly using questionnaires, to doing applied work and action research regarding societal conflict and how professionals could be prepared for their complex tasks, often demanding cross-cultural competences and collaboration skills.

Richard liked to experiment, in the broad sense of the word: to try something out and not wait for the perfect study. He took all his students seriously and stimulated them to play. Richard was playful in various ways. He had a good dose of humor, executed ludic experiments (for example going to the supermarket and monitoring (often suspicious) customers' responses when they were given one guilder), and was not devoid of eccentricity. At some point he was obsessed with the psychology of the cow (or so it seemed) – it is only now that I discovered the book that must have been responsible, entitled *What does the cow want* (Van Zomeren, 1995). Van Zomeren borrows a term from biology, namely neoteny, to argue for the importance to preserve childlike qualities, such as amazement and wonder. This term definitely applied to Richard.

Having been a nonconformist and an independent thinker, it will be no surprise that Richard entertained a well-developed loathing of bureaucracy and seemed to cherish an anti-military sentiment. Nevertheless, he worked closely with the military, both in his early experiments as well as in his later training and consulting work, although he admitted that he had to address some of his opinions first (DeRidder, 1994, p. 124). His curiosity and willingness to explore “difference” were strong. And his love for autonomy went very well together with an outspoken interest in others and a sincere wish to collaborate.

Playing was a serious matter for Richard. It was his way to discover the world, his idiosyncratic research methodology one could say and perhaps also to find out about his deeper self. Richard was a “bohémien” (Seigel, 1999), embodying a paradox of on the one hand finding one’s own (playful and nonconformist) style, seeking the boundaries of the social system and sometimes challenging them, while on the other hand also wanting to be part of that system, in the way *he* was. Richard will be greatly missed and dearly remembered for his curiosity, humor, engagement, creativity, warmth, loyalty and hospitality.

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