

## AZORA OPTS FOR ACTION LEARNING TOWARDS HIGH PERFORMING TEAMS

Nieuws

### Azora kiest voor Action Learning op weg naar high performing teams

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A lot is already going well at Azora, but that doesn't mean it will always stay that way. Healthcare is facing major challenges and Azora wants to be prepared for them. This is why a training course in Action Learning was chosen for the management team. Using this method, it becomes clear how to have a good conversation. The management team is enthusiastic, so enthusiastic in fact, that they are now striving to include all of Azora's employees in this.

Azora is a care organization in the Achterhoek region where living and working enjoyment are highly valued, and that has a positive effect. The residents of a dozen residential care centers and clients in home care rate Azora with an 8.5 on ZorgkaartNederland. For employees, working at Azora is a pleasant experience. The care organization has been voted Best Employer of Gelderland three times in recent years, and absenteeism among its more than two thousand employees is below the national average. Director Mieke Zemmeling can therefore be satisfied. "At the moment things are going very well. The clients are satisfied, there is a lot of salaried staff and there is low absenteeism. There is quite a steady line visible."

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Still, the good results are no reason for Mieke Zemmeling to sit back and relax. "It is important to look to the future in order to continue to do a good job even then. We see the challenges coming our way and there is a lot to do in elder care that we think is going to be exciting. The number of people needing care is increasing while the labor market is shrinking, so we will have to organize care differently. This generates discussions about what good quality of care actually is, says the director, who notes that conversations about this are not always conducted in a constructive manner. "I notice that when things get tense, there is a tendency to convince each other. At a

certain point you notice that you don't get anywhere with that. You hear arguments, but are you really solving a problem together?"

## **Action Learning**

Mieke Zimmelink has found a tool for having the right conversation in Action Learning, a methodology she previously trained with as a director from the Over Morgen program. "By applying Action Learning we can have the conversation even better. In the MT everyone has to be behind the decisions so that we can move forward easily and well," says Mieke Zimmelink. "We should not only look at the quality of the managers, but we need good teams in the future. We need an extra push to get to the next level as a team and be a high performing team. Action Learning is a great methodology to achieve this in a relatively simple way."

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Azora's management team, consisting of twelve people, attended a training course on Action Learning at the World Institute for Action Learning (WIAL). Frank Campman, co-owner of WIAL Netherlands, explains briefly what Action Learning is all about: "Action Learning really means nothing more than that we integrate working, learning, innovation and improvement into real work. With Action Learning, team members work simultaneously on improving collaboration, the team process, team behavior, discovering the real problem behind the symptoms and discovering relevant and new solution directions." For three days in April, the entire MT of Azora attended WIAL's sessions. During these sessions, the emphasis was on having a good conversation. The basis for this is creating a safe environment, in which team members dare to say something, ask questions and give feedback. One word always accompanies this: non-judgmental. "Being able to have a good conversation is a basic requirement for growing into a high performance team," says Frank Campman.

## **Tools for a good meeting**

In order to have a good conversation, the Action Learning methodology provides a number of tools. One handle for a good meeting is check-ins and check-outs. At the check-in, participants often share their thoughts, feelings and expectations regarding the session. The purpose of the check-in is to help the group focus on the current problem or challenge and to promote openness and trust within the group. The meeting concludes with a check-out to share reflections and insights about what happened during the session. Participants can discuss what they learned, what actions they want to take and how they experienced the session. The purpose of the check-out is to conclude the session and ensure that participants understand the value of their contributions. Another important handle is consent. During the meeting, there are multiple moments of tuning in to make sure that we are still talking about the same thing as a team and that people have been heard and seen before deciding on something. Such a moment always ends by asking everyone present to express their

consent. Frank Campman is happy to explain how this works: "Consent is different from consensus or 'I agree.' Everyone is asked on the spot to give consent. The moment someone says 'no consent' then they can give their weighty arguments for not giving consent. It is also possible to give consent with an addition to make it negotiable again at a later time when something arises. Then someone has lost it, it's on the table and you can always go back to it. What you then see is that you can generate a lot of speed because the other person has the feeling "I have been heard and seen. I've had my say'. By asking everyone for consent, decisions are made faster and involvement increases."

## **Positive result**

For the MT of Azora, the first introduction to Action Learning has already led to positive results. Mieke Zemelink: "We really have different conversations in the MT and decision-making is also different. The basis is listening and questioning and in addition you get a handle on the decision-making structure. Consent is very important. The way you make decisions makes sure you have support. That you really have the feeling 'we have a yes and we are going to do it' and not that people nod yes and think 'it will take my time'." The first effects of Action Learning within the MT are now evident. Decisions are made faster and implementation is handed over to others. "Often we were sitting around debating details when in essence everyone agrees. For MT member Lianne Spaan, the Action Learning sessions have also yielded a lot. "For me personally, it's mainly about connection, the connection between reason and emotion. That ultimately contributes to more effective cooperation," says the regional manager for Care at Home, who also feels more connection in the MT. "Within the MT we now connect with each other much more from the undercurrent. It's about the way we address each other, ask questions and reflect. In that, we really did develop skills that allow us to work more effectively toward the goal and result. You can reflect much more on each other by asking open-ended questions. By applying those tools, we as MT are much more able to connect the upper flow with the lower flow and therefore be more effective as a team."

## **Further dissemination**

A next step for Azora is for Action Learning to spread throughout the organization and for all employees to use it in their daily work. After all, it is useful for every employee. A conversation with a client or the next of kin can also be improved by a good way of asking questions and listening.

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The spread of Action Learning at Azora is partly automatic as MT members take it to other subgroups and apply the methodology in their own team. A concrete step to make Azora an organization that works according to the Action Learning method is to first involve employees in project and work groups. Meanwhile, from the Over Morgen

program, Azora has the opportunity to work with WIAL to engage Azora's program teams and also involve the region in this approach. In addition, a number of employees will be trained as Action Learning coaches. Frank Campman: "For this we are going to guide people from a to z accompany people while they are at work. Eventually there must be enough people within the organization who can take over my role so that it continues to grow. That's how you ensure that it continues; we're very vigilant about that."

### **How Action Learning can spread through an organization**

Lianne Spaan has now noticed for herself. She took it to her own team, one team member of which then applied it in a works council meeting. She too would like to see the method spread throughout the organization. "Action Learning is also applicable in implementation to achieve behavior change. I definitely think it contributes to a learning organization and to the maturity and self-organizing and problem-solving abilities of employees. This allows everyone to take personal leadership on their own job and task responsibilities. That means a positive culture change, not only for the MT, but for all employees."

Translated to English by Frank Campman, Senior Action Learning Coach, The Netherlands from the website [Azora kiest voor Action Learning op weg naar high performing teams - VVT werkt aan morgen](#)