

## ACTION LEARNING IN ACTION – BAYER NETHERLANDS CASE

During my 15 years with the large pharma / chemical concern Bayer, I have had various roles in various disciplines in several countries. Employees in Bayer benefit from lots of training and I have experienced many management and team development processes and programs.

During my assignment as Head of Marketing Bayer Netherlands I came across a situation where the company was doing very well financially, but in my conversations with the employees I discovered that they were less and less proud to tell at social events that they work for Bayer. This had several causes, including the increasingly stringent regulations due to a growing social debate about the usefulness and necessity of chemical crop protection in Dutch agriculture.

I also noticed that there were many "islets" or "silos", which meant that there was not many meaningful discussions going on. When I started thinking about methods to break this situation, I came up with the idea of organizing "Blue Sky" sessions. These are sessions in which we talk about the real problems that we are not tackling now because the company is doing well. I have always learned that you have to repair the roof when the sun is out. I then sought support to develop and execute this idea and discussed with my executive coach Twan Paes. Together we developed a "Blue Sky program" where we would build a "bottom up" vision and strategy. I did a test with my own Marketing department and the reactions were so positive that we convinced my fellow management team members to roll out the program for the entire company.



The program had 3 important phases:

### **Phase 1: Interpersonal style workshop for all employees based on Jung typology**

The feedback was that the employees really enjoyed getting to know each other better. There were many moments of recognition, but certainly also learning moments where people found out why getting along with a colleague was in some cases difficult and in other cases easy. We also found that 60% of our people had the green color, which means hard-working, skilled, loyal people, who do not really like change.

### **Phase 2: SHAPE-MOVE-IMPROVE**

We divided all employees into 3 groups over a period of 6 weeks based on their Jung typology. Every step in the process took 2 weeks. The purple (creative) and blue (strategic) people were formed into teams in the SHAPE step and they were given the task of coming up with all possible ideas about the question: "What kind of company do we want to be in 5 years (vision)?" and "What do we have to do to become that kind of

company (strategy) ?". The employees then sat together in Action Learning sessions (with a WIAL certified Action Learning coach) and used questions to explore these challenges. The results of this step were then explained by one team member to the next group in the Move step. Team members in the MOVE step were mainly red (action types) and a few green ones. Their task was to turn all ideas into a workable plan, which was again done in Action Learning sessions. Once again, the result was presented by one team member to the next group in the IMPROVE step, with the green (hard-working, loyal) colleagues. Th

e green employees used again Action Learning sessions to critically go through the plan and were given the freedom to change anything as long as their was consensus. In this way they made the plan their own and immediately ensured that it no longer changed.

### **Phase 3: Implementation**

The results of Phase 2 were shared with all employees in a 2-day event and employees split up in smaller Action Learning sessions to agree on the different elements, develop concrete time schedules and identify people responsible for the different steps. Our people had given the new vision and strategy a new name: Colorful Future! This was a very strong signal that all people were facing the same direction and were positive about the future, not only for themselves but also for our company.

In the following months, all aspects of the new strategy were implemented and we made great strides in those areas that we had designated as the focus area of the Colorful Future. Internationally, this process and especially its implementation was characterized as a "Best Practice" and I had the opportunity to share our story worldwide. We are very proud that a number of elements of our strategy have been taken over by the head office and implemented in 30 other countries!



A year later, in the following year's meeting with various Action Learning sessions, we evaluated our progress and made minor adjustments here and there. We have also taken the JUNG typology story a step deeper and made it more personal with the values that employees themselves find important and want to commit to the company. A nice value pyramid emerged that we shared with each other in order to create a team and even company value profile.

### **Conclusion**

There are of course many methods to break through silos or islands, or to turn around a negative working atmosphere and also to achieve a common goal. But because of the overwhelming success of the Colorful Future, I have always loved the power of JUNG

in combination with Action Learning in my heart. I see the best compliment in the fact that even years after I had been promoted at Bayer, the team members at Bayer in the Netherlands continued to rely on the Colorful Future strategy and the JUNG typology for a long time. It had become part of the team's DNA.

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