CONDITIONING HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS

Research from, among others, at Google and by Dr. Edmonson at Harvard shows that High Performing Teams function better. And from sports it is known that working in connection to a common goal leads to energy and unexpected results and innovations. Teams are more innovative and achieve better results because they have a higher degree of psychological safety than less successful teams. Because of this they dare to make more mistakes, to discuss ignorance and uncertainty with the intention to share information together, to learn from this, to experiment and to grow.

And exactly that is what is needed in a VUCA world and in matrix organizations, where you cannot know and do everything by yourself anymore. You have to be able to rely on your team member and on technique outcome like that of Action Learning!

To maintain psychological safety it is essential that the team members really (learn to) know each other well and that they have the skills to ask the right questions. Team members should be able to continuously ask the next deepening question, so that they structurally search for the undercurrent. That way they will learn from each how to connect to the uppercurrent. When the feeling of psychological safety is damaged, the inquiring dialogue about the real problem and the team goals cannot be started.

There are more elements that a high performing team has to master. The Team Performance Loop below describes six of these elements. The six elements are dynamically impacting each other and require structural attention. A High Performing Action learning Team (HALT) is able to play with the six elements in a competent way, being unaware of their competence. This would allow the team to slow down to look for the core problem in order to keep accelerating after the real problem is found. Collaborating in high performing teams is therefore a profession!

Team Performance Loop
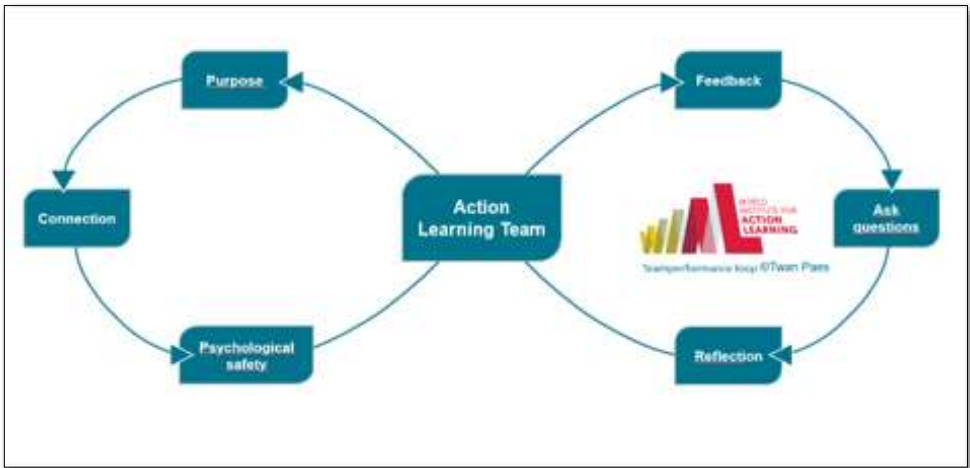
Starting point

The starting point is either an opinion, a hypothesis or a problem statement.

Step 1
Instead of someone immediately giving a judgment, statement or solution here, we first explore the context. What is the importance and/or impact on our organization and team? Why does the team member as the Problem Introducer (PiB) experience this posing this way? The team members question the PiB with open-ended questions and follow through on the answer. The goal is to get the wisdom out of the team, the colleague is heard and it stimulates bonding, evolution and correct decision making.

Step 2
The team is now going to discover the broader context on the basis of a team dialogue. Now using open questions and continued questioning in a converging and diverging manner and with an internal and external view; in the upper and lower stream.

The goal is to find out the truth, for whom it is a problem, when the problem occurs, is there an opportunity or is it a threat, is it a wicked problem or does it turn out to be more of a puzzle

that the team already knows the answer to. Is it a puzzle, solve it immediately. If it is a Wicked problem go to step 3.

Step 3
Before the team makes a decision or determines a solution, the team takes a closer look at the supposed wicked problem. The goal is to discover what causes the wicked problem. In other words, we are going to discover first: what is the real problem?

During step 3, the action learning coach will pause the session a few times to, for example, ask the PiB if he is being helped with the team dialogue, ask the team how they feel they are doing as a team or ask the tea about the quality of the questions. The team process can be discussed, are we addressing the undercurrent the right way and can we convert it into the upper current , what is the impact of the observation?

These are learning moments that don't come at the end of the day, but right on the table. Just like a parent discusses a learning moment with their son or daughter right away and not when the child has long forgotten it.
Sometimes the action learning coach waits to see if the team applies self-reflection, if not the action learning coach puts the conversation on hold to make the learning moment conscious as a team.

Team Leadership Development
In this process, we are simultaneously working to further develop personal leadership that serves to grow into a High Performing Action Learning Team.

Prior to the start of step 3, each team member identifies the personal leadership learning goal they want to work on in step 3. Examples include: asking open questions, not giving statements, diverging and converging, letting go, consciously slowing down, involving everyone in the dialogue, and how do I still make an impact when the team is already further along in the conversation than I am.

One of the team members is an observer in step 3 and provides feedback on the group process and on the personal leadership learning goal at the end of step 3. The team members and the PiB reflect on the process quality.

They do this by using a grade of 0 to 10 to indicate how well the group did. Then they answer the question what is going well and

what could be better. The reflection is not on the content, but on the group process that leads to evolution.

Step 4
In step 4, the team starts to work with the redefined problem statement in a team dialogue focusing on an intended outcome. Then the team starts to explore different solution directions. In this phase there are no right and wrong answers, only potential solution directions.

When the team has done this, they as a team consider which of the solution directions is potentially best suited to the sharply defined result to be achieved. Based on this, the team makes a choice for the most relevant solution.

In this phase to reach decision making, the team works with deliberately posed closed questions.

Also in this phase, the team members have a personal leadership learning goal and there is a team member observer for the group process and personal learning goal. As in step 3, the action learning coach will use the learning moments to support the team in the learning process of being a high performing team.

Step 5
In step 5 the decision from step 4 is translated into action. What is the team goal in this, which team member is going to take which individual action? In what timeframe and how does the team communicate about progress and what does the individual team member want to learn in step 5. What call for help does the team member have to the fellow team members for this.

Step 6
In Step 6, the team flows into the heartbeat of pitstops with Action Learning Pitstop to reflect and mirror progress in the team process. All the previous steps join in here. The goal is to consciously pause the process to learn to be a high performing team and to secure a permanent effective and efficient evolution.

Conditioning High Performing Team

All six steps are part of a conscious learning process to develop the skill to slow down first and speed up later. Skills to connect the bottom and top streams in the team process, bring about team-leadership development, and secure the evolution of the organization and of the team.

A High performing Action learning Team can qualitatively complete step 1 through step 5 in sixty to seventy-five minutes. Step 6, the Action Learning Pitstop including reflection, will typically require sixty to ninety minutes of team learning time.

In contrast, a start-up action learning team, under supervision for steps 1 and 2 including reflection, normally needs forty-five minutes to complete properly.

Day program

In a one-day program, a team can really get to know each other, work with each other in the undercurrent, make the team value pyramid, experience steps 1 to 5 and learn to ask questions and keep on asking deepening questions. These are all preconditions for being a high performing team.

Action Learning

Professor Dr. Reg Revans, the first professor of business administration in England and the founder of Action learning, experimented and published on this as early as 1950. Since then, Action Learning has evolved into the formula: P+Q+R+I.

This stands for discovering and using relevant Programmed knowledge (P) + asking the right questions(Q) + reflecting on your own actions and those of your team members(R) + doing and experimenting and improving during implementation (I).

Action Learning is therefore action-oriented learning in one's own complex/ wicked problems and challenges and finding and implementing the right solution to them.

Action Learning is therefore an established way of thinking, doing business and interacting in teams. Learning is vital for people in organizations. Without learning, there is nothing to gain, either for the organization or for the people in the organization. Learning must follow action, and evaluation of action can deepen learning. But in order to win, the team must ensure that people also dare to let go and lose the old. And that, with the biases that people are more afraid of losing than winning, requires attention in the undercurrent.

The dream of Action Learning coaches is that this form of leading change also leads to a learning, agile and more successful collaboration in your organization. It is the dram that team members reach the level of 'high performing action learning team' and condition and take the corresponding behavior and skills also in all other contacts, inside and outside the organization so that there is evolution.

WIAL Programs

WIAL supports this with team leadership programs and with internationally certified train the trainer courses.

> Following a plain script, team members are guided in their personal leadership development and their team process development. WIAL action learning coaches guide and encourage this process.

The Action Learning Coaches guide the team process and the team members take care of the content of their work.

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